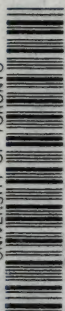


UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



3 1761 01094540 0



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation



THE
RUSSIAN
PEASANT



THE RUSSIAN PEASANT

BY
HOWARD P. KENNARD, M.D.

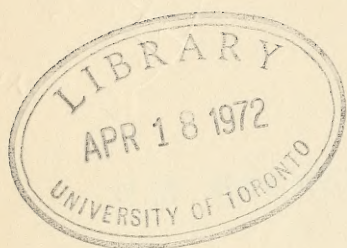


LONDON
T. WERNER LAURIE
CLIFFORD'S INN

MDCCCXVII

1907

89217
1717108



DK
32
K4

DEDICATED
TO MY REVERED UNCLES
ARTHUR AND WALTER KENNARD
OF EAST FARLEIGH, KENT,
WHOM MY BROTHERS AND I LOOK TO AS SONS TO
A FATHER, AND TO WHOM WE OWE A DEBT
OF GRATITUDE WE CAN NEVER
HOPE TO REPAY.

H. P. K.

SAMARA, RUSSIA,
17th May 1907.

PREFACE

THE Author begs humbly to lay this short sketch of the "Russian Peasant" before the public. It by no means pretends to be a deep, comprehensive, critical study of the Peasant and the Peasant question; that is reserved for a future work. It is indeed but the *frame* of the picture of the life-history of the teeming millions of those who form the real back-bone of Russia.

The Author has gained his knowledge of the peasant from personal contact, and living with him in the villages in all parts of European Russia—in the more cultured West, from Petersburg to the limits of Poland; in the frozen and scantily inhabited North; in the immense district of Great Russia watered by Mother Volga from Kazan to the Caucasus, and in Siberia. He has studied him at peace in the simplicity and quiet of his village *izba*, and has had the privilege of seeing him at war

in the late Russo - Japanese conflict, and his marvellous qualities of patience and endurance there brought out. Further, the Author is at the present moment witnessing and working amongst the Peasantry, exposed to the horrors of an unprecedented famine, which has reduced more than 20,000,000 to starvation and disease.

For historical information the Author has drawn upon the old records of Guy Fletcher, Anthony Jenkinson, the ancient Chronicles of Pskoff, the Records of the Troitsky Monastery, the *Secret Memoirs of the Court of Catherine II.*, *Moscovites Lettres*, the *Memoirs of M. de Mannheim*, Karamsin's History of Russia, and numerous antique documents in the Museums of Petersburg and Moscow. Further, he is indebted to the works of Mr Geoffrey Drage, Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace, M. Leroy Beaulieu, M. Wassielevski and Mr Morfill; and finally he wishes to express his grateful thanks for aid afforded to him in the past while travelling and working in Russia to his Excellency M. de Kerbedz and Madame Eugenie de Kerbedz,

whose friendship has been and is invaluable to him, and whose kindness and assistance he takes the opportunity of acknowledging with feelings of the deepest gratitude; to Mr Montgomery Grove, the British Consul in Moscow, Prince Nicholas Scherbatoff, Mr Victor Marsden (the able correspondent of the *Standard* in Moscow), Prince Galitzin, Mr Gulkevitch, M. Tatarenoff, M. Nicholas Shishkoff, and his friend Mr L. A. R. Wallace, but for whom this book would never have been published; also to the late Ambassador to St Petersburg, Sir Charles Hardinge, to whose aid in obtaining for him many special permissions, which made his travels and work easier, he is much indebted.

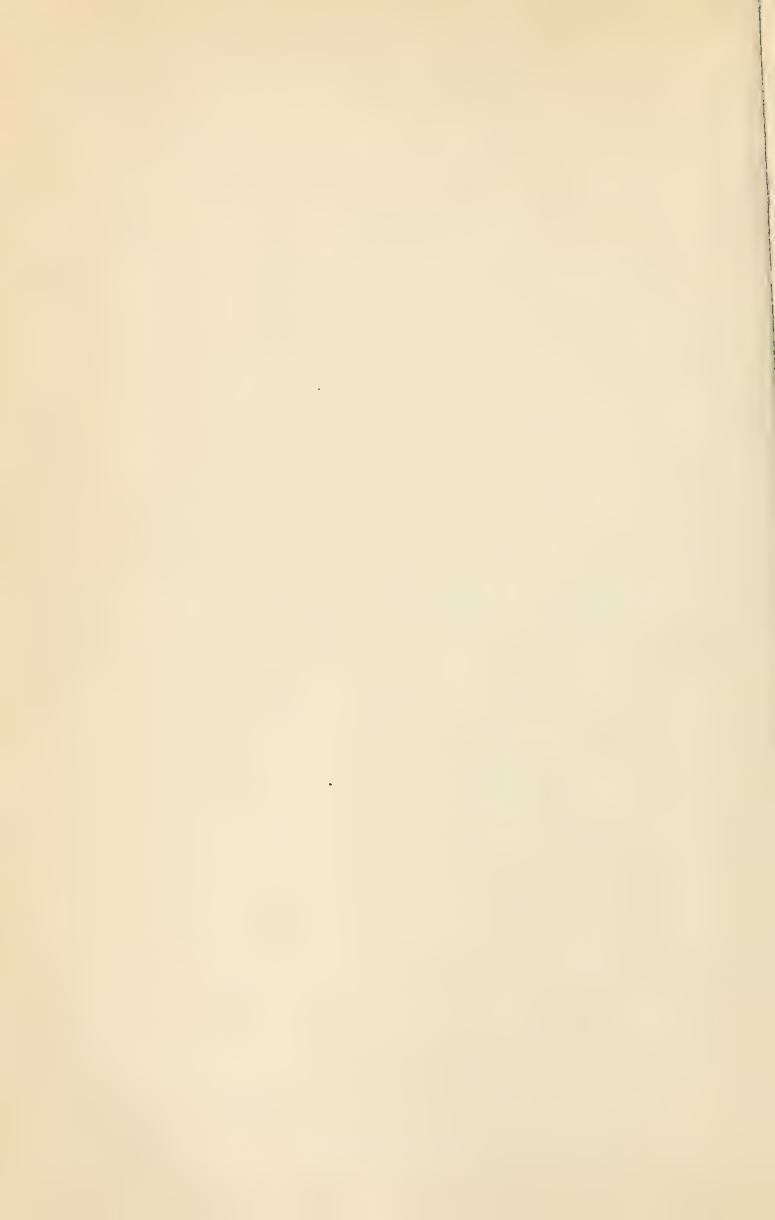
With this preliminary message of thanks, the Author launches his little work, trusting that it will meet with the approbation of an indulgent and not too critical public.

HOWARD P. KENNARD, M.D.

SAMARA, RUSSIA,
17th May 1907.

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. VILLAGE LIFE	I
II. HISTORY	133
III. RUSSIA'S POISON—BUREAUCRACY AND CHURCH .	206



LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

A RUSSIAN PEASANT	<i>Frontispiece</i>
AN IZBA OF STAROSTA, OR HEADMAN .	<i>To face page 24</i>
AN ISBA IN COURSE OF CONSTRUCTION. (In the foreground are shown Ancient Plough and Harrow.)	24
THE COMING OF SPRING	60
GROUP OF PEASANTS. (The <i>Starosta</i> (Headman) is second from the left.)	60
PEASANT BOY	96
A VILLAGE SHRINE	96
PEASANT WOMEN	110
A SHEPHERD	110
TYPE OF INTELLIGENT PEASANT	196
BLEENKOFF. (A peasant whose studies have extended beyond the literature of his own country. The works of Charles Dickens are familiar to him.)	196
BLEENKOFF (one of Russia's peasant intellectuals) AND HIS WIFE	144
GROUP OF STAROSTAS. (Heads of Villages.)	144
SIBERIAN PEASANTS	228
REFUGE HUT, ON A DESOLATE MOOR	228
VILLAGE SCHOOL, AND PRIEST. (The school teacher is on the right of the picture.)	250
SIBERIAN PEASANT AND HIS IZBA	250
VILLAGE POLICEMEN	280
RASKOLNIK PRIEST AND HIS CHOIR	280



THE RUSSIAN PEASANT

CHAPTER I

VILLAGE LIFE

RUSSIA! The very word breathes mystery to countless masses. France, Germany, India, Japan, America, Africa, Australia, even China — these are countries known of men; but Russia bids one pause, breeding a sense of deep obscurity and vastness, conjuring to one's brain ideas of despotism, ignorance, and serfdom. To countless thousands the word is synonymous with secrecy and prison bars, Siberia and the knout. It is not without reason that the foreigner who knows little of Russia is impregnated with these ideas.

Throw enough mud, and some is sure to stick ; and surely enough mud has been thrown at unfortunate Russia. Persistent rumour is generally bred of a nucleus of truth, and in Russia's case rumour has hardly exaggerated even infinitesimally the real facts.

Travel towards the East, crossing the Volga, surmount the Urals' crests, and wander at will across Siberia's plains. There one may meet from time to time, marching with downcast head and weary feet, in silence—such terrible silence that intensifies the solitude of the limitless wastes—a gang of hapless exiles, wretched, ill-clad, and often bootless, exhausted with fatigue and lack of food—the melancholy creaking of the chains, the long, long line of brethren in despair, taking the place of Nature's sounds and scenes. No deep blue sky, no gladdening sun cheers their leaden hearts—and Hope is dead. No twittering birds stir their souls sunken in blank despair—only the music of the clanking chains, day in day out, from dawn to setting sun. Tread—tread—tread—wearily wandering, on they go, young and old, women and men, linked with the links of mutual agony: intellect and innocence bonded with

sordid crime, refinement and culture with bestial ignorance and brutality — one long chain of mortals marching to their doom.

Hope, spirit, lost ; home, family, name, things of the past ; despair alone printed indelibly on each face. Tramp—tramp—tramp go the stricken souls, and jarring in unison clang the jingling chains—Death's orchestra, playing its prelude to rest eternal in some rough grave on Siberia's frozen waste, if God in His mercy grant them quick release, or else to life in a living tomb in the depths of the icebound mines ! No picture this, bred of exaggerated impulse. Trains have brought powers of transport, until recently undreamt of, and the Siberian Railway takes to their destination many unfortunate exiles who otherwise would have died on the way. But the railway is useless as a means of transport to other more distant localities, desert spots away in the frozen North, where man thinks fit to send his fellow-man even in the twentieth century of the Christian Era. And so to-day one sees ever and anon these serpentine gangs of God's creatures slowly wending their way, mile after mile, day after day, week after week,

till Death with its long gaunt finger beckons them to rest.

Follow the line of one of these funeral caravans, and mark the little mounds that ever meet the eye, telling of rest of some poor soul whose life was strife and silent agony, one long vain fight for freedom, country—all that God gave man.

Often have I paused and pondered amidst a little cluster of snow-clad tombs—a convict sepulchre: Who lies beneath that one? A stake driven beneath the frozen earth tells, it would seem, of efforts to mark the spot where sleeps some life-tormented soul. Was he a man of eminence, of world renown, of a talent that forced him on to action, compelled him to use the gifts bestowed on him to raise his stricken country from the mire, engulfed him in the whirl of politics and party strife, and finally sent him to spend his life in solitude, to waste his brilliant brain, his epigrams, his noble utterances, his thoughts and high ideals, on prison warders,—men but yet as beasts, the lowest criminals, dregs of humanity? Does he lie there, his proud, stricken heart broken with grief and with the knowledge that his life has been fruitless

and of no avail? does he lie there, fallen thus early from the ranks of those his comrades—comrades whom nothing but this cruel system, this indiscriminate bondage of man to beast permitted by Russia's rulers, could possibly have made his?

But this is only one picture, one aspect of Russia's life afforded to travellers who will dive into the unfathomable depths of this vast country. Russia is a country of contrasts and extremes—melancholy and yet gay, simple and even sweet, yet terrible, repulsive yet fascinating and seductive, mysterious and yet open as the prairies of its own boundless steppes, old and yet young—yes, young as a new-born babe; and all these contrasts and contradictions may be found reflected in the nature of Russia's people. Twist and turn it how one will, the predominant feeling stirred by the word Russia to-day is Mystery, and round it seems drawn a veil of impenetrable darkness, as if to repel all who would pierce that gloomy shroud, and gain knowledge of a land covering one-sixth of the habitable surface of the globe, and containing no less than 140,000,000, of four-fifths of whom literally nothing is known. Plain

upon plain, steppe upon steppe, soil frozen eternally year's end to year's end, contrasting with rich black loam which no country in the world can rival—vast wastes—huge tracts—many of which even to-day are unvisited—are scantily peopled by degenerate beings, remnants of long since departed races—solitude so vast that it is impossible for the Western mind, which knows nothing of real solitude, to picture it.

“There is noise in the capitals, the orators thunder,
The war of words rages ;
But there, in the depths of Russia,
Is the silence of centuries.
Only the wind gives no rest
To the tops of the pine-trees along the road,
And, kissing Mother Earth,
The ears in the illimitable corn-fields
Bend themselves in an arch.”

Thus the famous Russian poet Nekrassoff sings of his beloved country, which extends in one solid unbroken mass over 8,500,000 square miles of territory, stretching from the icebound Arctic seas washing its northern coasts to the shores of the Black Sea—from the Baltic's coasts and the borders of Germany, Austria, and the Balkan States across the plains of Eastern Europe and

the endless miles of frozen Siberian steppe to the warm waters of the Pacific, thus pressing with its ever-expanding sides on to the borders of Sweden, the cultured West, Turkey, Afghanistan, China, and Manchuria, and enclosing within its frontiers 140,000,000 of people. Yet till a very few years back this vast land was as a closed book, beyond the power of the outside world to read, and the outside world ignorant as a child of all but its very name. Why this astounding ignorance? It would suggest a lack of interest on the part of the Western nations, or else some deep cause emanating from the heart of Russia itself.

Firstly, of what is the Russian people composed? A country populated to the extent of 140,000,000, to which at the present time 2,000,000 is added every succeeding year, conveys to the ordinary mind visions of a Power which should long ago have made itself felt from world's end to world's end, the more so seeing that those millions are of the white race. Forty times the size of France—140,000,000 of inhabitants. Where are these masses distributed? and of what are they constituted? Fifteen millions belong to the towns—the Governmental, professional, official, and

social classes ; 3,000,000 are to be found working in the different manufactories throughout the country ; whilst to these must be added another 7,000,000 composed of those working on the railways, the minor provincial officials of all departments, the proprietors, and all who can claim to be counted as intelligent, intellectual members of the community. Another 15,000,000 must be assigned to the thousand and one tribes of heterogeneous race distributed over Russia's wide expanse—Finns, Tartars, Caucasians, Laps, Samoyedes, Mongols, Bashkers, Votiaks, Tchermishes—their name is Legion.

Forty millions accounted for—where are the rest? Where is this overwhelming mass of 100,000,000 which cannot be classed amongst the tribes of varied blood and breed congregated on Russian soil, and cannot lay claim to be numbered amongst those who have ordinary intelligence? Does Europe know them? No! Does Russia—that Russia represented by the governing, professional, social, and commercial classes—know them? A thousand times—No! Who are they then? The answer is simple and pathetic in its simplicity: they belong to one class, and one class alone—the

Russian Peasant—a body of men, 100,000,000 strong, of whom nothing is known. I say nothing, but I must qualify that statement, for during the past four eventful decades the attention of Russia's governing and intellectual classes has been drawn perforce to this previously neglected horde of human beings, which during centuries past has held quantitatively an overwhelming position, qualitatively *none*.

The first note was sounded by the Emperor Alexander II. in his speech to the Nobles of Moscow (March 1856). Beginning with a protective negative, as it were, he ends with a hint of such unmistakable meaning, that his real intentions are immediately revealed to the gathering :

"For the removal of certain unfounded reports, I consider it necessary to declare to you that I have not at present the intention of annihilating serfdom ; but certainly, as you yourselves know, the existing manner of possessing serfs cannot remain unchanged. It is better to abolish serfdom from above than to await the time when it will begin to abolish itself from below. I request you, gentlemen, to consider how this can be put into execution, and to submit my words to the *Noblesse* for their consideration."

Ominous words. No pleading request this from

a Constitutional monarch or Republican president, but a cold, autocratic demand from a man holding limitless power over Russia and Russia's people, a demand admitting of no doubt as to its real meaning, and allowing of no contra-arguments, uttered as it was by the lips of that omnipotent of all omnipotent beings on this earth, the Tzar of all the Russias, whose very breath is law.

The die then was cast, and Serfdom from that moment was doomed, and from that moment has the "peasant horde" thrust itself day after day, year after year, more prominently before the public and official eye of Russia, until now the peasant is recognised not only as a factor which must be taken into account, not only as a class for which legislative steps of the most statesman-like nature must be taken, but as the predominant feature of the Russian problem to-day—the actual key to the situation.

Russia awakes to-day like some prehistoric mammoth which for long centuries has slept, its huge unwieldy carcass wallowing in the mire, and growing with the growth of time, its vast exterior becoming ever vaster at the expense of those around it. To-day she wakes and shakes

herself, only to find that Time, while ever adding to her outward form, has allowed her very sap to remain stagnant, neglected, undeveloped. For this sap—Russia's life—Russia's real self—is nothing less than the Russian peasant, whose mind during centuries has been swamped in the dense morasses of ignorance, whose very existence as a man has been denied, and who has taken his place humbly and with a patience which Russians alone possess, from father to son through countless generations, as a working thing—an IT—on a level with the beasts of the field!

What is he like to-day? Come with me on my sleigh across the Russian snow, that eternal white mantle adorning the country for two-thirds of the year, and let me show you this strange individual. Wrapped in our furs, enclosing not only body but head and face, leaving but the eyes and tip of the nose exposed to the thirty degrees of frost, made keener by the faint breath of a north-east wind, we are drawn rapidly along by our couple of horses. The hard glistening snow grinds out its creaking music with each fresh blow struck by the horses' hoofs, and our sleigh glides noiselessly along, drawn seemingly

without an effort on the part of the magnificent brutes who need not the "Noo Noo: Malootka moy (my little one), Noo Noo—eete (get along)," uttered in persuasively seductive tones by the voice of our driver, as he sits with arms outstretched, a rein in either hand, trusting to voice alone to urge the animals on. On, on we glide, with a sense of luxury which only a swiftly running sleigh and rich warm furs can give, till suddenly Ivan, our driver, fills the air with shouts: "Berege, Berege: noo, doorak: Berege" ("Look out now, fool, look out). There is no response, and with a supreme effort Ivan forces the striving, straining horses back upon their haunches, and they madly paw the air in vain effort to continue their headlong flight. "Berege Berege," shouts he in stentorian voice: "Pravo" ("To the right"); but there is no response.

We stop dead, and glancing beyond our horses' heads, we see a broad, low-lying wooden sleigh, triangular in shape, and all lined with straw, on which lies full length a seemingly inanimate thing. Ivan with his whip, which is rarely used except on such occasions as these, bestows with all his force some half-dozen blows on this object, and as a

result the thing awakes, and discloses itself to our gaze as a human being.

'Tis he — the being we are in search of — the Russian Peasant! A long sheepskin coat, originally of a yellowish brown, but now a polished, dirty mahogany hue, crumpled and creased by age, and veneered with a greasy shine born of the wear of years; a cord about the middle; a pair of enormous feet and ankles encased in voluminous folds of felt, with strips of leather for soles, the whole encircled with strands of cord; a high-peaked pyramidal sheepskin cap, from under the brim of which protrude here and there wisps of an unkempt shaggy head of hair and tawny yellow beard; a pair of vacant, lustreless eyes, and the tip of a broad-spread nose.

This is our friend the peasant. Imagine him thus, and you have a faithful picture in your mind's eye of the peasant as he is during the greater part of his annual existence—that is to say, during seven long wintry months, with perhaps a month on either side of that period; for according to his ideas, the summer is only a chance interval, a sort of Nature's mistake, during which he comes out from amidst the depths of his

reeking bedding, from sheer inability to bear the heat, and hastens with feverish glee to wallow in its warmth again at least a month before there is any need, only relieving his body of its inexpressibly dirty and foul environments when four weeks of the warm suns of Spring have melted the snow.

This is our friend whom we have waked from his slumbers. He hears no speech, he sees no scenes, he is incapable of observation, he possesses no understanding, his brain never works except in reference to objects that hit him between the eyes—but he simply *does*—does like a beast of burden, knowing neither the why nor the wherefore, neither asking nor expecting to be asked, neither knowing nor wanting to know; lying listlessly full length on his rude wooden sleigh loaded with wood, and drawn by an emaciated apology for a horse. Wearied long since by his overwhelming load, he plods across the wintry snows, looking neither to right nor left, his head bowed down—dreaming—sleeping—oblivious to all sights and sounds, winds and weather—sheep-skin without, sheep's brains within.

Is this a type of the Russian peasant? you ask. It is, and the type *par excellence*, if one excepts

certain differences of visage, dialect, and customs, to be found throughout the whole extent of the Russian Empire to-day.

What can be put to the credit side of the account of this unfortunate creature? He has simplicity in overwhelming abundance — faith, trust, obedience to authority which he himself really believes in—all blended with an innate cunning bred of his very ignorance, and fostered by instincts of self-preservation, which only too often lead his poor deluded judgment hopelessly astray—a cunning which has led many superficial observers to believe that he has a formed intelligence. No greater mistake was ever made. He has not.

Much intercourse with the Russian peasant has convinced me that that head, covered with shaggy hair, whatever it may have in it, is at present an unworked mine. There is wealth there, only waiting to be exploited by broad, liberal educational measures of a yet-to-be-created enlightened Government, but—he must himself wake first; he must himself produce the first spark; the spark of individual effort must show its long-awaited light before the world can gauge with

even the faintest degree of exactitude what is or is not hidden within that skull of apparently impenetrable density, into which nothing enters and from which nothing intelligible ever makes its exit.

I speak broadly of the Russian peasant—the ordinary everyday specimen, and not of the exceptions. Amongst 100,000,000 there are many to whom my description is not applicable; it would be indeed a marvel if amidst these millions there were *not* a few exceptions—but they are few and far between, and comparatively insignificant drops in the ocean. It is these exceptions of whom the world hears as getting up political agitations in the villages, taking part in and organising sober assemblies, at which the rights of man, the condition of the country, the needs of the peasantry are sagely discussed; it is these exceptions which one hears of as being elected to the electoral colleges for the Imperial Duma—and actually for that Imperial Duma itself; and it is these isolated facts that prompt the uninitiated in Russian affairs, and more especially in the affairs of Russia's peasantry, to run away with the idea that that type represented at the above-mentioned assemblies

or at the Duma, is a true and everyday type of the great Russian peasant class. No greater mistake could possibly be made. The true peasant is uncultured, uneducated, ignorant of the most elementary facts known to babes in other countries of the West and East, thoughtless, and buried in the mire of stagnant callousness and hopeless indifference.

In my wanderings amongst the western districts of Russia during the past few months, I have alone aided medicinally 1300 peasants; and whilst treating their bodies I have in each case carefully investigated the condition of their minds. Of these 1300, composed of Russians, Letts, and Poles, 80 were able to read and write a little,—that is, 6 per cent.; but subtracting the Poles and Letts from the number, I find that the percentage of the actual Russian peasantry able to read and write is 2.

My investigations in Central Russia, in the Government of Orel, last year gave a slightly better percentage. There, out of any given hundred, 4 as a general rule could read and write, but the area of distribution of these men of letters varied immensely. Sometimes one would

find a village of about 700 to 2000 inhabitants where 10 per cent. could read the paper, while again on many occasions, on inquiring from such people as the priest, the village merchant, and amongst the peasants themselves, as to the literary capacities of the inhabitants, I obtained the astounding answer: "No one can read or write here"—and this in villages with populations ranging from 500 to 2500! Reasons for this lamentable and almost incredible ignorance are not far to seek, and these I shall allude to in a later part of this little work. I will only say here that the Russian Governments of the past, and past wielders of the Russian Sceptre, are badly—very badly—to blame.

Where does the peasant eke out his existence?

With your hand shading your eyes from the dazzling sparkle of the snow, glance to those neighbouring hillocks by the frozen lake, and you will see a cluster of white dots on the still whiter landscape, which stretches in one monotonous sheet as far as the eye can see, and on, on, far beyond the limits of the snow-capped horizon, over the whole vast land of Russia. If one could peep beneath these coverlets of white, one would

find that this straggling zigzag collection of tiny specks is nothing less than a mass of dilapidated wooden tenements. A few black beams uncovered by snow at the side of this or that *izba*, together with here and there the curl of blue smoke, alone tell us that this melancholy white mass, buried beneath the snow, braving in solitude the wintry blasts that sweep over the desert, is indeed a collection of human habitations. There, sparkling in the sun above the lowly roofs, is a golden ball topped with cross and crescent surmounting the blue-roofed church, emblem of that religion which almost co-equally with the Government itself has so much to account for in the condition of the peasant to-day.

Let us accost one of the inhabitants who is going towards the village, and visit his home with him. He turns to gaze on us with open mouth, and in response to our salutation says "*Zdrabyete*" ("Good morning"), at the same time raising his hat from off his shaggy locks, and retaining it in his hands for the space of half a minute despite the bitter cold, disclosing his features, and showing us the type most common to the Russian peasant—a low, broad forehead, lined horizontally with deep

furrows, surmounting a large nose broadening towards the nostrils, but withal well proportioned, and a mouth, thick-lipped, coarse, and large, hidden amidst the entangled hairs of his reddish moustache and beard. "*Zdrazbyete*," says he, and with the greatest affability, in response to our request, offers to escort us to his home.

A visit, in winter for choice, to one of these villages would prove a novelty indeed to dwellers in more fortunate lands, where civilisation and education have comparatively raised the toilers of the fields and dwellers in town and hamlet to a state of absolute luxury.

Most people would turn away with a shudder when only within *smelling* distance (if I may coin such a vulgar expression) of a Russian village; but there are many to whom the interests of the poor are a real source of anxiety and solicitude, and it is these that I ask to come with me now. We will endeavour to make the everyday life of the Russian peasant, that almost mediæval person, as much as possible an open book.

Along the narrow, snow-covered, sleigh-beaten track leading to the village we jolt, for one of the peculiarities of all fairly frequented roads or

paths in Russia, is the number of deep holes and hollows. The reason for these might seem rather a puzzle to the uninitiated, but in reality the explanation is simplicity itself. Before the snow falls the road is marked already here and there with small depressions ; then given a fall of snow, and then a continuous traffic of broad flat peasants' sleighs over the surface, one will soon observe that in proportion as the snow falls, the deeper these holes or "*dirries*" become. A biting side wind completes the business, and it is common to see, a few days after the winter snows have appeared, a continuous series of these *dirries* transforming the well-worn cross-country paths into ups and downs more like a switchback than anything else.

Along one of these we now wend our way under a brilliant sun, and there in full view, lying in the hollow amidst the hillocks, are the roofs of the village we are in search of.

The first sight to strike the traveller's eye in every village throughout Russia is the golden dome of the village church, and it gives food for thought. Comparisons crowd upon the mind. This brilliant spectacle—this noble edifice raising its head from amidst the most incredible squalor—

what is it here for? What good does it do to these wretched beings to see a sparkling diamond from which it is impossible for them to obtain food for their hungry children, let alone religious comfort for their souls? Of what benefit is it, think you, for these poor wretches to gaze on this showy outside, and be told that it is the emblem of the Church and the House of God, when in some villages they may frequently see His minister as drunk as one of the lowest of his parishioners, or indulging in peculations and shameful bargains, such as we should associate with the riff-raff of London and Continental cities?

The interior of these edifices — regarded as places of religion, for the practice of meditation or for the receiving of spiritual food — is even more of a delusion. All is glittering, all is mystery, all is calculated and purposely calculated, and *has* been purposely calculated for centuries past by the priesthood, to breed in the simple peasant mind superstition and fear rather than devotion. All is show, inside and out. A peasant of intelligence, entering into this brilliant building, hoping to find consolation in trouble, might be likened to a starving child outside a

large pastry-shop, where the rich viands are only for show. The interior of the Russian church is the same. The odours of the incense, the overwhelming display of golden *ikons* or sacred images, the decoration here, there, everywhere, like sugar on the surface of a rich cake, fills the mind with wonderment, but leaves the heart unsatisfied. These buildings, which are ✓ such a picturesque addition to the landscape, are the outward sign of that institution, the Russian Orthodox Church, which, in combination with the Bureaucracy, has done more to degrade the unfortunate peasant than anything else we can name. Show inside—show outside—nothing more.

But here we are in the village proper : a zigzag, straggling row of broken-down, lop-sided, wooden hovels, stretching as far as the eye can reach on either side of the snow-beaten switchback road. Method is absent. Each built his little *izba* or cottage where and how he thought fit—this way, that way ; front to the east, front to the west—anyhow, and apparently without rhyme, reason, or forethought.

Many of my readers may have seen the Irish cabin ; these are superior to the Russian

izba in many ways. Take one. The Irish cabin is, at any rate, blessed with a chimney. You may look in vain in many a Russian village for a chimney in the tumble-down *izba*, and the village we are about to visit is no exception to the rule. A chimney there, surmounting the village *lavka* or spirit-shop; another there, on the house of the priest; and perhaps one or two gracing those rather superior houses, the domiciles of the village *starosta* or chief of the village—a gentleman who can generally spell out a few words if you give him time, and who perhaps has heard of the existence of other countries besides Russia, and may even have a semi-intelligent interest in the so-called “elections” for that institution gilded with that terribly impressive name, the Imperial Governmental Duma. On the *izbas* of such of the village intellectuals as these I have named you may see chimneys, but you may look in vain for any others. True, standing apart from the village there is a house of stone, quite equal in construction to many of our London suburban villas; but this is the dwelling of the *pomiestchik*, or proprietor, of whom we shall have a few words to say later.



Izba of Starosta (or Headman).



Our business now is to visit the peasant in his home, that peasant whom we see every now and then peering from behind a small foot-square pane of glass at us as we drive through the main and only street of the village, conducted by our lately-made peasant acquaintance. Our friend suddenly stops outside a roofless, dilapidated, snow-buried construction, and with a gesture and in a voice in which we can almost detect a touch of pride, says: "*Pozhalovesta, gospoda*" ("Please, gentlemen"), and with a wave of the hand signifies that that is his home, which he invites us to enter.

Huge stones and clods of earth, apparently cast down without any attention to the artistic, form an elevated basement, on which long planks of timber rest, to form the floor of the dwelling. The walls are constructed by placing one upon the other trunks of trees grooved crescentically in order to fit dovetailed into those below. Between the crevices are stuffed masses of tow and moss. The roof is formed of planks, on which is laid a very inferior thatching; but generally none at all is to be seen, for frequently this same thatching is needed as fodder for the cattle, and so gradually disappears. The wooden structure rises perhaps eight feet from

the ground, and encloses an area of 14 to 20 feet square, more or less, according to whether the hut has two rooms or one.

Outside this dwelling we stand gazing in wonderment, until our friend again bids us enter, which we proceed to do, while imagination builds for us a picture of what the interior of such a structure must be like. Reader, you may build and build with the phantom bricks of phantasy a picture of what to you would seem the extreme limits of poverty - stricken dirt and squalor, but you will never succeed in successfully portraying to your mind's eye a true representation of the interior of a Russian peasant's *izba*. I will endeavour to paint it for you, but feel myself hopelessly incompetent to give you a really faithful picture.

To obtain a true and life - lasting impression of this worst of all holes in which human beings of the white race—and Europeans withal—live, it is necessary to visit these haunts personally. There lies the door, a massive piece of timber four feet high, surmounted by a solid beam; a triangular piece of iron the handle. Pushing this door open, we step over the threshold, at the

same time bending low for fear that our brains shall be dashed out against the lop-sided trunk overarching the narrow entrance. Clang goes the door behind us, and we find ourselves like mice in a trap—our feet enveloped beyond the ankles in farmyard slush, while utter darkness bids us stand fast, fearful of falling out of what is evidently nothing less than a dungyard into what might prove to be a sewer. Whirr! whirr! flutter innumerable wings of birds above us, while *débris* falls in heaps upon our hapless heads. Between our legs rushes in headlong flight some animal which on reflection we take to be a pig, while others of the same species, and a terror-stricken goat and yet more alarmed fowls, scatter themselves this way, that way, vainly endeavouring to hide themselves from what they take to be the pursuing hand of man.

Our eyes at last become accustomed to the dense darkness, and we see a tub in one corner, beams athwart the roof, on which perch the members of the feathered tribe disturbed by our entrance. Puddles of insanitary messes reflect a dull light, while from the same pools of filth rises an unutterable stench. These our friend the peasant

bids us mind, but we need no warning; having tasted the *entrée*, we feel that we know what to expect. Vanity of man! We pride ourselves on the fact of having been bold enough to brave the unknown horrors of a peasant hut, and flatter ourselves that the worst is over.

Wait!—that door at the side leads apparently into another apartment, if we can speak thus respectfully of this insanitary den. We push and push again at this solid wooden structure, rather larger than the corresponding outside one; but our efforts are of no avail till aid from the inside is afforded us, and the door bursts open, exposing us to such an atmosphere that drives us back into the darkness of the outside room—rolls of vapour, impregnated with the most unutterable odours; superheated, dense, vitiated, unventilated streams of air rush through the outlet afforded by the open door, enveloping us in such an indescribable stench that we can do nothing more than gasp in horror, and cover our noses with our hands in vain attempts to shut out the evil smell! We are permeated through and through by the death-laden gust of abomination, and are filled with a feeling of unutterable repulsion that temporarily deprives us

of courage and power to proceed. But the die is cast; pride forces our unwilling footsteps on, and summoning all the resolution that is left in us, we literally *cut* our way through the rolls of nauseating vapour, and the door shutting behind our hesitating figures, leaves us in a steaming hole inexpressibly fouler than that we have just left. We stand cut off from outside air, from light—in utter darkness—subjected to conditions under which it would seem impossible for human beings to exist. The dense fumes of smoke and steam deprive us at first of all power of sight, but gradually, as our eyes become more accustomed to the unnatural surroundings, we begin to perceive to what our curiosity has led us.

Looming through the stifling sickly mist appears a large white block of stone, taking up a third of the tiny room, and rising about five feet from the floor. This is the oven, an indispensable necessity to the peasant. From this rises a leaden pipe, which suddenly bends at right angles, and passing parallel to the ceiling, traverses a hole over the top of the door, and gives an exit to the steam, if considered necessary to provide an exit for it, into the outer apartment. A hole made in the

pipe, covered at will by a strip of lead, admits the steam when required into this, the room *par excellence* of the Russian *izba*, and supplies both the heat and comfort.

We have said before that there is no chimney in the ordinary *izba*. The steam, as shown above, finds vent within, and the wretched inmates not only wallow like pigs in this pestilential atmosphere, blended of the excretory putrescences exhaled from the bodies of men and animals—for there lies a pig, and yet again fowls!—but he actually utilises it at times for the purpose of a vapour bath. He loves this vapour-laden condition — he has been brought up in it; it is to him as the breezes of the hills and dales are to the hardy Scot, and he would be lost without it. It breeds a sense of cosy well-being in him. One can say, without the slightest exaggeration, that he loves this foul-smelling, nauseating hell far better than the limitless expanse of fresh air outside. He is part and parcel of his own filth-sodden *izba*.

The stove, besides acting the part of vapour and warmth producer, is used as a kitchener, in which everything is cooked, and as a sort of open wardrobe on which everything is laid to keep

warm. Further, it is used as a public bed for the family, for on the top of this sleep during the night, and frequently during the long winter days, men, women, and children—as many as can crowd on its broad, accommodating surface. Here they congregate in a huddled mass—man with wife, brother with sister, and as often as not a son will marry and escort his spouse to the top of the self-same stove, there to take her place amongst her newly-found relatives, and add yet one more human item to the already overcrowded *izba*. Pigs, lambs, fowls, lie where they may, and all are covered with loathsome parasites of varied breed, of which the peasant takes not the faintest notice. Custom has inured him to their attacks, and so the disgusting reptiles live their life unimpeded year in, year out. Fresh air there is none, except that occasionally admitted throughout the outside door, and “filtered” through the comparative purity of the outside room.

A small 12- to 14- square-inch pane of glass provides a window, incapable of being opened, and too small to do more than admit the very faintest rays of light which, entering, streak the scanty furniture—a tub, a table, bench, and a few

cooking utensils of iron and wood. Other means of light there are not. Light, air—two of the greatest necessities for human existence, human cleanliness, human morality—are thus denied to these wretched creatures. From day to day, night after night, from year to year, they live—father, mother, brother, sister, babies—in this vitiated hell, herded together in this the sleeping, sitting and working room of the Russian *izba*, deprived of God's air, God's light, and ignorant, as we understand it, of even God's presence!

It is true that if we look into the farther corner facing the door of every *izba* we shall never fail to find an *ikon*—a semi-pictorial, half-length representation of the Madonna, covered all but the face and hands with some metal, generally tin. This is the emblem of their religion, a religion which influences through terror rather than through love. For them religion spells superstition, a subject I shall return to later; but I have said enough to show that it would be wonderful indeed, seeing the state in which they exist, if purity prevailed or if morality held sway. For when did morality ever go hand in hand with filth? Whence can come the admiration for God's beneficence when

superstition is the single item of knowledge they have learned from their priests, who, until but recently, were themselves, hardly without exception, a disgrace to their cloth and models of immorality? Whence can come veneration for Nature and the Creator's greatness when for centuries the peasant class has lived, wallowing in filth inside their homes, without the shadow of a suspicion of education or enlightenment provided for them by the ruling powers, and have been subjected to a tyranny, up till 1861—the date of the Emancipation—without a parallel in the history of the world? I say up till 1861, one might say up till 1907, and be guilty of small exaggeration, for the efforts of the Bureaucratic *régime* are still constantly directed towards the placing of obstructions in the path of peasant enlightenment, efforts so ably seconded by the hands of a ruthless and brutal police, and a more brutal soldiery, and also last, but not least, by the clergy. I therefore feel justified in declaring that little, if any, advance has been made in the treatment of the peasants since the reign of Catherine the Second. Then why wonder at the peasant's condition? why wonder at his *izba*?

why wonder at anything in connection with him or his pitiful existence? To-day he merely "exists," and continues this existence in the tumble-down ruin we have described.

But *izbas* vary as does the region. In the north, where the soil is bad, but where there is much wood, the cottage is necessarily made of wood. In the south, where the soil is better but wood is scarce, stone supplies the material—and here the best *izbas* are seen; but in the centre of Russia, where the rich black earth or *Tchernoziom*, the best soil in the world, is found, there is neither wood nor stone, but one vast prairie. Here the *izbas* are constructed of thin wood brought from afar, and roofed mainly with straw — all is of straw, the stables, sheds, all.

But there are two pictures we must look at: the *izba* in autumn and the *izba* in spring. At the former period they are newly thatched, and bear, if not actually a luxurious, at any rate a neat and clean appearance; but in spring, after the troubles and trials of the terrible winter, when the rye has long ago been taken to market, and the remainder has gone in payment of taxes, when there is no more hay, and the animals are

emaciated skeletons—what is to be done? Only one thing remains—to denude the roofs of straw and give it to the poor starving animals.

But in times of sickness the Russian *izba* becomes even more insupportable than I have described. It has been my custom, while travelling through the country, to have always a supply of drugs handy for the benefit of the sick or starving peasant, and the utter misery that has been presented to my eyes would, if I could paint the conditions of existence in these huts, draw tears from a stone. We are face to face now with a famine of almost unparalleled magnitude, and now is the time that philanthropists, those who have the means, must open their hearts and purse-strings.

Let me quote from the letter of a Russian gentleman (Mr Shishkin) to the *Times* only a few days back. Says he:

“Hundred of thousands of people are on the verge of starvation; both scurvy and typhus, those inseparable companions of famine, are commencing their fell work. In more than 25 provinces the crops have been far below the average, and in eight or ten of them there has been virtually no harvest whatever. In our vast province of

Samara, for instance, the average quantity of grain harvested in 1906 is less than 100 lbs. per acre, or less than half the grain sown. And 3,000,000 people have to live a year on such a crop! The terrible drought that brought on this result has also destroyed nearly all the grass, and arrested the growth of even this miserable quantity of cereals, *so that our peasants have neither hay nor straw*. Not only are the people reduced to starvation, but their only hope for the future—their working cattle—is rapidly perishing. As far back as two months ago more than 200,000 horses and 85,000 milch cows had been killed or had perished in this one province, the loss in certain districts ranging from 20 to 34 per cent. Can English readers realise that a family of eight persons—five of them grown up—can live a whole year on rather less than one shilling a day? Well, that is the average cost of our peasants' food when the harvest has been fairly good. What makes the life of a Russian peasant especially bitter during a year like this one is not only the want of food. He has to suffer all the other ills consequent on utter destitution. Hunger forces him to sell off all his belongings—his warm clothes, his utensils, his last cattle, sometimes his cottage, and but too often his future crops and his labour. The outbuildings, the cattle pens, and empty barns are used up as fuel during the cruel frosts of our Russian winter, for where there is no money for food there is none

to spare for fuel. Often two or three families crowd together in one log-house about 20 feet square, and demolish the other cottages to feed the one remaining stove. One must see this to understand all the misery that a human being can endure before he gives up the weary struggle for existence.

"The unfortunate peasantry, after selling all that *can* be sold, try to eke out their last supply of rye flour, or millet, by mixing all kinds of eatable but useless ingredients with it—bran, grass seeds, chaff, and even straw. This autumn thousands of persons lived for weeks on acorns, parched and ground up with a small quantity of rye or wheat, and eaten either as a porridge, or baked into hard black cakes. Often the husks of the acorns were mixed with meal, to add to the volume of this awful food. I strongly doubt whether any animal would touch this stuff, which was doled out in small portions even to the weak children. The last resource of the famished people is to lie motionless day and night, as every movement trebles the pains of hunger. What wonder that a very few months of such a diet end in wholesale epidemics of typhus and scurvy?"

Thus writes Mr Shishkin, and every word of this sad history I can confirm from personal experience. Let me give but one sad instance, which I can take from numberless cases of a like nature.

Just previous to the real beginning of winter I was informed of a village in which famine was beginning to be prevalent, and scurvy was breaking out. I travelled thither on my sleigh to see what could be done. The village proved to be a wretched collection of huts, in the middle of a swamp formed of half-melted masses of snow and morasses of mud. In one of the worst spots lay a low tumble-down ruin, its roof a collection of loose planks, and denuded of the thatching that once graced its summit. There was no chimney.

The entrance to this dwelling by a small wooden door, which was reached by dint of tramping through ponds of mud slush reaching to one's knees, was so small that it was necessary to crouch low to negotiate it. Having entered, one found oneself enveloped, as usual, in thick clouds of foul-smelling vapour. Lying on a mass of straw distributed over a wooden bench lay a wretched, emaciated girl of seventeen years of age, half clad and inexpressibly dirty, the vermin crawling unheeded over her trunk and limbs, while, to my horror, I noticed batches of bloated flies tumbling over one another in their efforts to feed on the sores left bare by the loathsome parasites. Her

hectic cheeks and sunken eyes, together with a hacking cough, told their tale: the girl was dying of phthisis, preceded by famine and scurvy. At a slightly higher level, on the stove itself were a baby and a young child of three to four years old, enveloped in loathsome rags, while close up against them were a couple of fowls. On the floor, not three feet from the dying girl, was a young calf lying in a heap of dirty straw commingled with manure, while still more fowls were to be seen perched on points of vantage on the cross-bars of the tiny roof.

This was not all. In another corner of the room was a lad, likewise dying of starvation, the victim of typhus and scurvy—his face drawn and pale, his gums painfully tender, blood oozing from them at the slightest pressure, and his teeth loose in their sockets; unable to eat anything solid, even if it were provided for him; too weak to move, too weak to speak; his legs swollen, angry spots on the skin causing the most intense itching and pain, and a blue-black condition of the skin surface caused by the rupture of superficial blood-vessels. In places the distended skin had burst, leaving large open sores. The boy's breath

smelt unbearably, and the best and most charitable thing one could wish him was a speedy release from his sufferings in this world.

Further, in various stages of undress, were to be counted no less than six other human beings—three children, with their mother, all in a state of indescribable filth and pitiful emaciation, their hair matted in hopeless entanglement, and cemented by the matter exuding from unsightly sores, evidently of long standing. I questioned the family, and discovered that their breadwinner, the father and husband, had died for his country in Manchuria, and a grateful Government thus attended to the needs of his dying wife and children. Their food was a semi-poisonous kind of weed, ground up with a little rye flour, acorns, and oak bark. Throughout the village the same conditions held.

And what was the Russian Government doing to alleviate the awful suffering? Selling the grain from these very provinces to foreign buyers, and denying the existence of a famine in all mighty Russia. "Famine!" said they, "there is no famine; that is an electioneering cry of the revolutionaries." The Russian Government did not *want* to know

of these terrible events happening in the middle of Russia, for it was necessary, in their opinion, to send every ounce of grain abroad, that the year might figure in the Budget as a prosperous one, and that not only might Russia pay interest on its debts abroad, but wheedle the Powers to supply it with fresh loans. So there was no famine — none officially, in the same way as, until only a few weeks back, there was no official famine in South-Eastern Russia.

“Put an embargo on grain leaving port,” say humane persons. “We did so,” said the Russian Government in 1891, “but it made no difference” — but they omitted to give the reason: the embargo was laid on Russian grain *after every ounce had left port!* And so to-day the same evil deeds are committed under the garb of officialism.

Until only a few weeks ago, although this present famine is the largest and most terrible for many years, the reports sent in by the local Governors and other bureaucratic officials stated that there was only a little “local scarcity,” and again, when at last the real nature became patent beyond all possible shadow of doubt, millions of roubles intended for the relief of the suffering

peasantry, and the purchase of grain went into the pockets of the corrupt bureaucracy.

Let us now turn from the condition of the peasant physically, living in his *izba* in sickness and in health, and look into his character.

I must say at once that he is immoral and lazy to the core ; he loves nothing better than to have just enough money or provisions in hand to allow him to have a good long drinking-bout and a longer sleep.

The unequalled laziness of the Russian peasant is no doubt due in part, at any rate, to the climate, which keeps him snow-bound seven months in the year, which paralyses effort, and minimises the actual facilities for labour. Further, his laziness is no doubt due to the terrible state of ignorance in which he is engulfed, and to the strenuous efforts made by the Government and the Church in combination to keep him supplied with a superabundance of holidays, sacred and secular, on which he *must* not work. Hence we find that if a day is not devoted to some saint of mythical memory, then there is a birthday of a Grand Duke. And if the Church is hard put to it to find an excuse to keep the *muzhik* from his daily toil,

the bureaucracy come forward with cringing supplications to His Majesty to name that day a holiday, in honour of his having escaped typhoid or smallpox, or some other disease which he was never in any possible danger of catching, "for the sake of the peasant, and to alleviate his toil." I quote from an Imperial Ukaze of 1906.

The peasant, when not actually working, does not know what to do, except sleep; and this he does with consummate ease at all times and in all places. Neither reading nor writing is at the command of the ordinary specimen. My own calculations in Western Russia show that two per cent. can read and write a little, while in some of the provinces of Central Russia four per cent. have these acquirements. But beyond this there is in the Russian peasant an innate sloth, a love of idleness which enchains him in a vice, and in itself has done much to stop progress throughout all branches of civilisation the length and breadth of this vast country. If the peasant *can* be lazy, he *will* be, and it will take a great deal of persuasion and very excellent offers to make him turn his hand to anything if he has decided on a long loaf, even if he knows that at the end of

it he will be penniless. There is a hole in the Russian peasant's pocket which allows money to run out as fast as it runs in. To sum up, he is a spendthrift of the most pronounced type, and in laziness has no equal. In summer he works on the fields, and in winter lets out his horse, if he has one, for transport of grain, wood, merchandise, etc.

In some parts of the country the peasantry, owing to the praiseworthy initiative of certain of the *noblesse* and landowners, are engaged in what is called "*Koostarny dielo*," or "hand manufacture"—baskets, spoons, forks, toys, basins, etc., etc. In the provinces of Pavlovo whole villages are engaged in the manufacture of cutlery. In that of Vladimir the making of *ikons* is the chief means of subsistence, while Prince Galitzin informs me that he is working night and day to introduce pottery-making among the peasantry, and already many thousands are engaged upon it. Further, Mademoiselle Mohl has organised a staff of workers amongst the peasant women, who are taught to manufacture cloths of cotton and wool by hand. Yarvslaff supplies waiters for the *traktir*, and Tartars from Kasimoff are much in demand for the

best Russian hotels in Petersburg, Moscow, and the other big towns throughout the Empire.

If one was asked for further characteristics common to the peasant, one might say that he is almost as cunning as he is idle—but it is, be it understood, the cunning born of ignorance, and is blended with an enormous admixture of astounding and childlike credulity.

A really magnificent instance of this credulity reached my ears only eight months back, when I was touring through the Province of Orel in Central Russia. One day a man of dignified mien, with long brown beard, dressed as a priest, and armed with a long pilgrim's stick as if to denote that he had travelled far—a supposition which was fostered by the fact that his boots were worn into holes and he limped painfully at each succeeding step—arrived in a certain village in that Province, and with wild enthusiasm narrated how he had been sent forward by the Emperor to choose a village which contained a church (some of the minor scattered hamlets of eighty to a hundred inhabitants are not possessed of one). They were duly flattered by reason of the holy man choosing their village out of all the villages

of Russia for the reception of the Little Father, the Tzar, and more so in that they were accounted such men of genius. Further, they felt no small pride that the Little Father should really be about to honour their village with his presence. Some few had their suspicions, which were deepened when the holy man said that it would be necessary for all the villagers to provide food and cattle of one sort or another to be presented to the Emperor, and further, that at least 100 roubles must be collected to present to the Church, for the meeting was to be not only presided over by the Emperor, but was to be quite unique in the history of Christendom; also, not only would the food and cattle be restored twentyfold by the Emperor, but the Church would repay ten roubles for every one collected.

This was a bait indeed; but the suspicious ones still doubted the words of the holy man, and finally asked the priest, whom the Emperor was about to meet. This was the question the man of God had awaited. Said he, tearing his hair in apparently frenzied wrath: "O ye miserable unbelievers, ye of little faith, may God pardon you for your faithlessness in doubt-

ing me, His messenger. The Emperor meets here no other than God Himself."

The effect was astounding. All were electrified, and stood dumb with amazement, and the suspicious ones disappeared into the background, and hung their heads, ashamed that they had been impious enough to distrust the messenger of God Himself, and that they had almost gone the length of rejecting the proffered visit of the Creator. Money was immediately subscribed, and not 100 roubles, but 200—"for," said the simple *muzhik*, with that mixture of ignorant cunning and credulity I have alluded to, "if God will return us tenfold the gifts we give, let us then give 200 roubles instead of 100." And in like manner the village was cleared of its cattle, its horses, its goods of every description, and for the same subtle reason.

Rejoicing was rife, and the man of God looked on, an expression of holy enthusiasm pervading his features.

The goods collected, he suggested that it would be advisable to drive all the cattle to a large shed five miles away, when preparations would be made to present them to God and the Emperor a week

from that date. "Meanwhile," said he, "you must spend your days in prayers and fasting, and on the seventh day march with reverence to the spot agreed upon."

The peasants did exactly as they were told, and fasted religiously all the week; indeed, they had but little left to eat, after giving up all their meal and other material, and prayed mightily that their gifts might be acceptable to the august Personages concerned, and more mightily still that all would be returned to them with ten times the amount added.

Six days elapsed, and on the seventh in long procession the denizens of the village marched to the shed. Wonderful! As they approached, nothing unusual could be seen. "Ah!" said they, "God is mysterious. He will be there awaiting us with multitudes of angels. He can do things we wot not of."

They reached the shed, they entered the large folding doors, and, to their blank amazement horses, cattle, and goods—all had vanished! The peasants could not believe their senses, and many prayed that God would show Himself to them—but God did not appear, neither did the Emperor,

and neither did the holy man of God, His messenger—and further, to this day they have seen and heard nothing of their money, cattle, or goods!

Episodes such as these are not uncommon amongst those ignorant Russian peasantry, their cunning being of that type born of ignorance and sufficiently developed to keep them from being defrauded by any other forms of trickery except such as have a basis in religion. Religion and its power is so engrained in them, more as a thing to be feared than venerated, that it needs but little of its gloss to polish the most unlikely tale with the glitter of undeniable truth.

Their religious feeling has its expression in popular demonstration, more than is found in any other country in the civilised world. No Russian peasant enters into the *izba* of another without first inclining his head reverently towards the family *ikon* hanging on high in the further corner of the room, and crossing himself with a degree of fervour which would lead one to believe that he was paid for it.

The manner in which the Russians cross themselves is entirely different from that of the

Catholics. The little and third fingers are drawn back into the hand, the index and middle, together with the thumb, project as a mystic symbol of the Trinity, and the whole body is bowed at the same time. The Russian peasant, in order to accomplish this ceremony to his liking, needs a little plot of ground all to himself, for he bends his body double, so that his long shaggy locks, from which his hat has been removed, sweep the ground in front of him; then, with an upward movement of his whole anatomy, he swings his head back, and at the same moment brings his arm to attention, and sweeps the sign of the cross over his chest.

Go where one will throughout the length and breadth of Russia—in town or village, in the crowded public street, or in the quiet solitude of the isolated *izba*—one never fails to see the peasant performing this ceremony, more, as it seems to me after watching them under a variety of circumstances, as an outward mark of their religious zest, as a demonstration to the Deity that they have not forgotten Him, than from any real sense of religious fervour.

As I have said, they fear rather than venerate,

and the more a Russian's education proceeds, the more does this become evident, from the fact that this very education breeds indifference. The more a Russian becomes disentangled from the priestly network of superstition which for centuries has been sedulously fostered by Church and State, the more he looks upon the rites of that Church and its various requirements from its children, as so many things that have to be done in the day's work, and so it is as well to do it and get it over.

Belief in the efficacy of the sign of the Cross, or real feeling of the Divine greatness at the time of making it, there is not amongst the educated classes, as a general rule; and one will see the most ridiculous proofs of this in the manner of performing it—for instance, after a banquet. It is done unconsciously and by many over the region of the stomach; many perform the act while laughing and talking, and I have frequently observed the finger, in its course over the breast or elsewhere, stop dead during the utterance of some emphatic remark, or during some convulsive burst of Homeric laughter, and then continue on its involuntary course. But amongst the lower classes it is done both volun-

tarily and involuntarily, before and after eating, on going to bed and on rising, on all occasions of ceremonial connected with Church or State, or with the local village Commune; on passing church or shrine, especially if either is dedicated to his patron saint; on meeting with friends in the early morning or bidding them good-night, and, what is most to be deplored in connection with the exercise of this meaningless ceremonial, is that it is performed (in combination perhaps with the lighting of a taper in a church and the presentation to a patron saint) by every villain previous to his deed of crime—be it robbery, fraud or murder — showing that those of evil intent hold the sign to be of as great assistance to them in their nefarious designs as do the presumably righteous in their well-doing.

When a Russian has indulged to the full in a superabundance of crossings, and lighted a candle of a respectable value to his favourite saint, he feels himself as secure from the clutches of the evil one as if he were safely ensconced in Abraham's bosom.

A scoundrel once wrote to his accomplice :

“ To-morrow is the day, dear Ivan, when we may

at last begin our enterprise. I prithee do not forget to light a large candle to the Mother of God of blessed memory, in Kazan Church to-morrow at nine o'clock. I will do likewise to St John, in the Church of the Holy Trinity."

The enterprise was to rob his master of 10,000 roubles, which he actually did, and murdered him into the bargain, while the tapers were still burning—a fresh candle no doubt being lighted after the event to celebrate the success of the deed.

Amongst incidents of a minor nature it is extremely common to see *muzhiks*, or town cabmen, or indeed any Russians of the lower classes, fighting amongst themselves (not very vehemently, it is true, for your true Russian has not the energy), and interspersing their shouts and curses—which they shower upon the head of their opponent—with a multitude of crossings.

It is an everyday occurrence to see the Jehus of St Petersburg and Moscow frantically rushing to be first to obtain the prospective "fare," as the latter sallies from the door of his hotel, and then, one having attained the prize, to see the other madly chase him, raining imprecations upon his head. Thus the wordy warfare proceeds, inter-

spersed with sundry prodigious blows of each other's whips across the sheepskin-covered backs, when suddenly one will see them stop in their headlong flight, cease their cursings, and reverently lift their hats as they pass some well-known shrine or glittering church, crossing themselves the while. This done, the fight goes on anew, as if nothing had happened to cause an interlude. This is a sight that may be seen any day and at any hour in the streets of any great Russian city or town, and it speaks only too eloquently of the real value which is attached to this outward symbol ordained by the Russian Orthodox Church.

In every house and room throughout Russia is hung an *ikon*. It is as if it were deemed impossible to perform any act—to work, play, read, write, breathe — unless in the presence of these representations of the Virgin, or of one or another of the Holy Saints, who in Russia number legion (one at any rate for each day in the year), and of whom the most common and most generally venerated is St Nicholas.

Amongst many wealthy Russians one will find their houses decorated everywhere with these outward signs of devotion. I have seen in the town

mansion of a rich Russian merchant, as vulgar as he was rich, chests of these *ikons* in silver, copper, tin, and even in gold. Amongst the peasantry, one finds their *izbas* decorated almost solely by these sacred images—many dirty, badly painted, and lustreless; and on frequent occasions, during feasts, festivals, fasts and special holidays, birthdays, baptisms, funerals, is a candle lighted and placed in a holder opposite the principal *ikon*, hanging in the corner of the room facing the door of the *izba*.

When a peasant yawns, he will turn to this *ikon* and make the sign of the cross before his open mouth to stop the devil getting in; and again, if he is about to do some bad deed, such as steal from the pocket of a drunken comrade, or perhaps set out on an expedition by night to steal his master's wood—a very common employment amongst the peasantry in the winter—he will carefully turn the face of the *ikon* to the wall, praying that that holy emblem may not be a witness of his evil deed.

Other pictures adorning the walls of a peasant *izba* invariably include an old dust-begrimed moth-eaten representation of Alexander II., the

Emancipator of the Serfs, and also a cheap engraving, distributed broadcast throughout Russia by the Government, of the reigning Tzar. Sometimes may be seen great flaring, vulgar designs, generally in brilliant red, depicting the devil dealing out judgment to peasants after death for all their sins, those sins being generally pictorially represented. Thus there will be a church, in which presumably service is going on, and a *muzhik* will be seen standing outside drinking from a *vodka* bottle, the devil meanwhile patting him on the back. Another will show a room, on the wall of which hangs a large portrait of the Tzar. In front of this kneel in reverent attitude, crossing themselves, a mass of peasantry, but one—the Wicked One—will be seen standing in an attitude of defiance. What is the result?

To the right of the picture will be seen another dreadfully impressive scene, which does not fail to have its due effect on the unfortunate Russian peasant. In that picture is seen a large foaming cauldron, by the side of which stands the devil in brilliant red, holding a long three-pronged fork in his hand. With this he is prodding some unfortunate object which sits in the cauldron

being slowly boiled; the object is seen to be the unfortunate *muzhik*, while a legend in large letters reads "eternal fire"! These pictures too are distributed by an enlightened (?) Government.

All the miracles from the time of the Creation may be seen pictured in red, blue, green, yellow, and a hundred and one other colours. One particularly, which attracted my attention in the *izba* of a rather well-to-do peasant *starosta*, or head man of his village, was a representation of the "*Deneshnoi diavol*" or money devil.

The devil is painted a superb purple, and is flying with outstretched wings, and claws and talons outspread over the whole world, and amongst the cities, towns, and haunts of men. From every part of his anatomy — mouth, hands, feet, and hair, gold coins are protruding, and falling in endless shower upon the ground beneath. Men in thousands of all degrees pursue the flying devil, to catch the gold falling in such abundance. Behind the devil rides on a rampant yellow horse the devil's adjutant, flogging his animal with the wand of Mercury. A butcher has lassoed the evil spirit with a thick rope, and is feverishly attempting to draw him nearer and stop his headlong

flight. Another has managed to encircle the devil's great toe with a bit of string, and is doing his level best to do the same as the butcher. The owner of a restaurant or Russian *traktir* has managed to insert a tube into the devil's back, and sits contentedly tapping the gold and silver, which pours in continuous streams into his wine-barrels, whilst a Russian lady adorned in all her finery, and attired as for a ball, hangs lovingly round the neck of the devil's adjutant, cajoling him into giving her money-bags, several of which she has already tied round her slender waist.

The Church does not escape, nor does the Government, from which one may safely gauge that in this instance the picture was not distributed by either of those degenerate institutions. A fat priest, with face beaming with a seductive, mealy smile and expressive of the utmost hypocritical humility, stands before his congregation, exhorting them with hand on high to do their duty to their fellow-man and to the Church. "Collect ye not the treasures of *this* world," says he, and at the same time one notices that his left hand is extended behind his surplice, and into it is being poured streams

of coin which the flying devil showers down upon him.

The Government is represented as follows: A large crowd of starving, emaciated peasantry stand and kneel in supplicating attitudes before the gigantic figure of a man representing the majesty of official Russia. Fat, repulsive, double-chinned, and vulgar to a degree, he stands with pockets bulging with gold, into which the devil is pouring yet more, whilst behind him stands the Angel of Charity, representing the real Russian people, divesting herself of her last gold pieces to give to him (official Russia), in order that he may distribute them to the starving wretches. What is the representative of Bureaucracy doing? He is gingerly giving out *kopeks* (the fifth of a penny) to the dying multitudes, while across the bursting pockets runs the legend, "For private needs." Finally, apart from all the crowd, smiling with intense irony, sits a little ape crunching nuts and spitting upon a gold coin which has rolled his way. With one hand he points to a sign-post, which reads, "To Hell," in which unenviable direction all the people described are going, and he is saying, with reference no doubt

to the Darwinian theory, "Fools! why were they not content to remain monkeys?"

Thus we see that the Russian peasant, devoid of all capabilities in the matter of reading and writing, has a mind and imagination which are ripe for the reception of all trash that Church, State, those desirous of influencing him for good or evil, may pour into his poor besotted brain. So it is not strange to find that not only is he a slave to the deceits practised by men, but that he is even more dominated by superstition, and feels himself bound by irrefragable obligations to numerous spirits, which he imagines infest this wicked world.

It is generally understood amongst the Russian peasantry that swarms of spirits—good, bad, and indifferent—wander at will through the universe, and nothing will shake from him this belief, which again, let me add, is sedulously fostered in his all too credulous brain by the iniquitous representatives of the Church. Every spot on the world's surface harbours these spirits: not even the sanctity of the Orthodox Churches is respected. These immaterial beings are, as a rule, the personification of evil, and the bitter



The coming of Spring.



and unrelenting foes of mankind. They penetrate into private houses, into human bodies, into holy edifices; they swarm in river, lake, pond, and swamp. They wander at will through forest and valley, and across the boundless plains, bringing disease, temptation, and every conceivable form of misfortune in their train. Their number is legion, and they are blessed by the peasantry with all kinds of names—*Tchort*, *Diavol*, and others—all of which can be translated by the one word "devil."

However, in different provinces, according to supposed misdeeds of the evil one, the name undergoes a change, and so in this way each spirit has some thirty to forty different names.

With regard to the special attributes of the spirits, the popular peasant imagination divides them into the following distinct groups, and it is indicative of the state of mind and the bringing up of our unfortunate friend, and of the moral and intellectual teaching bestowed on him by the Church, that the *only* subject he knows about is the subject of these devils. If he does not know any minor detail regarding the life-history of some spirit, he says, "I will ask the

Priest," proving that the source of his instruction is the Church.

Let me give the list of spirits, as known to the Russian peasant and ecclesiastical world, and follow it up with a sketch of the attributes of each of the evil ones:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|
| (1) Household demon or | <i>Domovoi.</i> |
| (2) Farmyard " | <i>Domovoi dvoroff.</i> |
| (3) Bath " | <i>Bannik.</i> |
| (4) Barn " | <i>Ovennik.</i> |
| (5) Hole " | <i>Keekeemona.</i> |
| (6) Wood " | <i>Leshi.</i> |
| (7) Field " | <i>Polevoi.</i> |
| (8) Water Demons " | <i>Vodiavoi.</i> |
| (9) Water Fairies " | <i>Roussilki.</i> |
| (10) Incarnations (substitutes) | <i>Oborotni.</i> |

The *Domovoi* or household demon is that one most commonly to be heard discussed by the *mushiks* at work and at rest, at market and fête, on festival days and the holidays in honour of any official function. "What will the *Domovoi* do to-day?" is the Russian peasant's first thought. "What *can* he do?" we may ask. Much! He haunts dwellings, and plays disagreeable tricks on unsuspecting housewives and their husbands; but he can also be domesticated and made almost harmless. However, he is none the less feared, and the peasantry often allude to him as "grand-

father." Peasants, as a rule, tell me that the *Domovoi* cannot be seen, but those who profess to have been honoured by a private view (generally the biggest liar and greatest hypocrite in the village) are looked upon with nothing short of veneration. By these the *Domovoi* is stated to be in possession of a rasping, hard voice, and to be covered with soft hair, like the down on a baby's skin, even to the palms of his hands. His principal occupation is to hide in stores, cupboards, boxes, and moan dismally, occasionally asserting himself by sitting on men's chests while they sleep.

The Russian peasant, after a heavy carousal, and a consequent invasion by the evil *Domovoi*, prescribes another bottle of *vodka* for himself, and gets drunk again. Before any extensive culinary operations the Russian peasant women invoke the aid of the *Domovoi*, and I have frequently seen her endeavour to propitiate the spirit in favour of her sinning husband, who is out late at night on a drinking bout, by placing outside the outer door provisions, such as bread and a bottle of *kvass*, in order that the *Domovoi* may eat and imbibe, and guide her husband's footsteps

safely home. In family events of any importance, such as marriages, births, death, food is placed on the threshold both inside and outside for the *Domovoi's* consumption, with the words: "There for thee, grandfather *Domovoi*; may your deeds be well for us, and mayst thou aid us with thy kind assistance that our actions may prosper, our children grow up, and our hens and pigs multiply."

In return for all this attention bestowed on the *Domovoi*, he, when in a friendly disposition, is said to warn his hosts about impending trouble. In what manner he does this I have never succeeded in ascertaining; but it would seem that it is done through the medium of dreams. Further, the *Domovoi* gives the peasant advice by means of the same medium, and, strange to say, the dream often takes the form of advice to the peasant to steal his master's wood, potatoes, and what not. This he religiously proceeds to do, feeling absolutely justified in the performance of the deed, for one must know a Russian *muzhik* if one wishes to be acquainted with the type *par excellence* of that human being who can convince himself that that is right which he in his inmost conscience

knows is wrong, but which he ardently wishes to *believe* is right.

The *Domovoi dvoroff* or farmyard spirit is a malign person who delights in tormenting domestic animals. It is owing to his evil influence that cows get weak and thin, horses get mutilated, and their tails cut. His appearance is that of a man, but covered completely with hair. He exercises complete dominion over the farmyard, and when the good Russian housewife takes a goose or fowl from the farmyard stock, she often practises deception on the *Domovoi dvoroff* by hanging up the head of the goose or fowl in the poultry-shed, in order that the spirit, when he counts his *protégées*, may not discover that one has been removed.

The *Bannik* or bath demon haunts bath-houses, which in consequence are not considered safe after midnight. He hides under the shelves round the bath-house, is a very malicious spirit, and capable of the most outrageous crimes against the person, so in consequence the peasantry do all in their power to flatter him. At the time when the

peasants bathe, it is known that the *Bannik* takes his bath at the fourth turn. This turn he usurps for his own, and peasants therefore always avoid bathing after the third, fearing that hot bricks may fall on them, boiling water be thrown at them, steam scald them; and the method therefore adopted is to leave the bath-room, in the event of the peasants bathing singly, after the third turn to the exclusive use of the *Bannik* for a period varying from twenty minutes to half an hour, and then after that period to return. In the Russian villages no one bathes after seven — that is to say, in those districts where the belief in the powers of the *Bannik* prevails; for it is an unwritten law, handed down from father to child for generations and generations, that after that hour the *Bannik* takes possession of the bath-house, and invites the devil omnipotent with his friends to wash. So much is this believed in, that in many villages I have seen grown men and women afraid to walk in the direction of the bath-house, and you might offer them solid gold to walk past the door, but they would not accept it.

The *Ovennik* or barn spirit. — Village barns are ill-built wood constructions, and owing to the peasant's carelessness are frequently burned down; but simple and natural reasons are not admitted for these catastrophes. All evils of this nature are placed to the credit of the barn spirit. This evil personage sits in the darkest corner of the barn, and can be seen only once a year, viz. during Mass on Easter Day, when he can be recognised by all who are foolhardy enough to endeavour to catch a glimpse of him, as a large black cat with gleaming eyes, barking like a dog, and mewing like a cat. He is well disposed, as a rule, and much may be done to pacify him. In the winter, rather than that he should set the barn alight in order to warm himself, I have known peasants in the central provinces of Russia burn each night a small quantity of wood and straw in the open outside the barn, in order that the *Ovennik* may, if he pleases, come out and warm himself; this too in villages where wood has been scarce and poverty prevalent, showing once more the depths of folly to which superstition will lead them.

The *Keekeemona* lives in holes, and plays tricks, and frequently is associated with the entangling of skeins, the mixing of threads, and the spoiling of spinning. But the main function of the *Keekeemona* is the causing of epidemics of disease. To-day in Samara, where the famine is raging, and typhus and scurvy with it, it is safe to assume that in the eyes of the peasantry the evil time has been organised by the *Keekeemona*. In the year 1891, the year of the great famine, the peasants of Kharkov Government met, and solemnly forwarded a petition to the Tzar's Most Excellent Majesty through the hand of the Governor, to the effect that, "seeing that that child of the devil, the *Keekeemona*, was absolutely and solely to blame for the terrible want of provisions, would His Majesty take the necessary steps (*sic*) towards the extermination of that spirit." History does not relate what the Tzar replied, or indeed if the petition ever reached him, which I gravely doubt.

The *Leshi* or wood spirit lives in the woods, preferring more especially old, moss-grown, venerable firs. His appearance is that of an old man,

his eyes burning with an unsteady flame. He grows at will into a person of immense size, or vanishes into thin air. While walking in his realms, he is taller than the tallest elms, but on coming into the open he can and does hide himself under a leaf. He is the despotic monarch of the forest, makes people lose their way, frightens them to death, and is reputed in many districts to have a terribly sensual nature, and to seduce women and girls indiscriminately. To some people he is very friendly, and will frequently bring game almost within reach of the hunter's hand, and lead him straight to their most frequented haunts. The peasants often bribe him extensively by leaving a dead hare or rabbit in the wood for his consumption.

The *Polevoi* or field spirit takes the form of a peasant man, dressed in white. His body is black, eyes of various colours, and instead of hair, his head is covered with green grass. He is well disposed, but teases unmercifully, and especially annoys drunkards, his favourite hours for mischief being midday—a peculiarly honest acknowledgment on the part of the peasant of his frequent

condition at that hour. Sometimes the *Polevoi* gets dangerous, and strangles the peasants sleeping in the fields. If agricultural tools will not work, if some part of the mechanism breaks, or if the soil is too hard to allow of sufficient working, all these difficulties are put down to the account of the evil *Polevoi*; he again is bribed by the peasantry. I have seen an intoxicated *muzhik*, before lying down to sleep in the field, place another *vodka* bottle full of the stuff by his side, and with the words, "*Vot deliar tebye, Polevoi!*" ("There! that's for you, *Polevoi!*"), sink to slumber.

The *Vodiavoi* or water spirit haunts lakes and dangerous marshes. He keeps a strict guard on his dominions, and it bodes ill indeed for those who defy his wrath. Sometimes the *Vodiavoi* takes up his abode in rivers and streams, and frequently sleeps the night under the wheels of a watermill. He can be seen sometimes as an ordinary man, but with very long fingers, and nails on his hands and feet varying from a foot to a yard long, his hands being rather more like paws than like ordinary hands. His head is

covered with long hairs; he has a very long tail, and eyes which burn like a red-hot coal. He never comes quite out of the water, but shows himself at half length. He drowns imprudent or evilly-disposed people bathing or sailing on his domains, and delights in killing those who never wear their baptismal crosses, and forget God. Bruises, marks, wounds on the body of a drowned man are invariably taken as proof of the torments inflicted by the *Vodiavoi*. He is most disagreeable to millers and fishermen, but some of the latter come to an understanding with him, and get proofs of his friendship. But throughout Russia the peasantry believe that he requires human victims for his daily food, and nothing will convince them to the contrary.

Near Antonopol, in the province of Vitebsk, is a small pond, where at midnight—punctually on the stroke of twelve—may be heard, according to the peasants, the shrieks of frenzied men and women rising from the bottom. The legend is that five hundred years ago a wicked Russian noble had a castle on this spot, which of course was dry ground, surrounded by a moat filled with water. This evil man employed his castle for the

purpose of one long debauch, and was in the habit of scouring the country to find young women and girls, and carrying them by force to his stronghold. For years this went on, till one day—on Christmas Eve—when the castle was the scene of more outrageous orgies than usual, suddenly on the stroke of midnight the whole building sank with its inhabitants into the ground, and only a pond remained to show the spot where such wickedness had held sway. This, say the peasantry, was the work of the *Vodiavoi*, in retribution for the sins of the wicked baron.

The *Roussilki* or water fairies are represented as beautiful women and girls, young angels, singing and dancing in the moonlight on lakes, pools, streams, etc., trying to attract men, whom they torment and drown. The most fervent belief in the existence of the *Roussilki*, and the most poetical stories and songs regarding their deeds, are to be found amongst the people of Little Russia. They are credited with tearing fishermen's nets, and it is believed that girls who drown themselves through love—a very uncommon event, I should say, amongst the Russian peasantry—become *Roussilki*.

Oborotni are either men changed by sorcerers into animals, trees, or stones, or evil spirits taking any form necessary to acquire their object. The most common form is that of a she-wolf, which may transform itself into a dog, a cat, a bust, a stone, or a tree, and then return to the image of a man.

Obinenki. — Yet other spirits are supposed to be devils' children, which are substituted in the place of human babies, profiting by some imprudence or forgetfulness on the part of the mother. This belief does sometimes very great harm to quite innocent beings. Only a few months back a case was brought to my notice of a poor woman who had been chained to the wall in a peasant *izba* for no less than thirteen years. The facts are as follows: At the age of nine she developed a hoarse, guttural cough and a peculiar, rather vacant expression of countenance. At the same time, according to the peasantry, it was noticed that into whatever house she entered there was sure to be illness. A consultation of the elders of the village was held, and it was decided *nem. con.* that this

unfortunate girl was no human child, but the child of one of the numerous devils, which had been placed as a substitute in the cradle during the period of suckling. A wise *babooshka*, or old woman, was called in to give her opinion, and without any hesitation gave it on the side of the majority. The mother was informed of the terrible decision, and such is the faith of the peasant in devils, and all things appertaining to them, she acceded to their inhuman request, which was that the wretched girl, in order to stop her wandering in the village and doing harm, should be chained to the wall of the *izba*. This was done, and after a more or less lengthy period the child became mad, but was kept chained for thirteen years, until she died only a few months back. Other similar cases have been brought to my notice, and I have no doubt that, if the truth were known, such instances of credulity and cruelty are very numerous.

Ruled with a rod of iron by the religious duties imposed upon him through his belief not only in the prescribed ceremonies of the Church, but also in the powers of the spirits of good and evil in the world below, the Russian peasant should be,

one might imagine, tolerably pure within. We will give him the benefit of the doubt, and infer that he is inwardly clean. As to his outward condition, the state of his *izba* might have led my readers to suppose that his body was kept in harmony with the filth there prevailing. Then my readers can disabuse themselves of this idea at once, for, in a sense, he is cleaner in body than our own English agricultural labourer, and can give him points. The peasants love their vapour bath as a fish loves water, and not content with turning their *izbas* into ovens filled with steam, in order to indulge in their favourite relaxation, they are in the habit of frequenting *en masse* the village vapour bath once a week, or, at any rate, once a fortnight. It is a quaint sight! Round the walls of the public perspiratory establishment are broad shelves in tiers one above the other; wooden tables lie here and there, on which are emblems of castigation, in the shape of bundles of twigs. A huge stove, from which protrudes a chimney, is seen in one corner of the room, and from this emerge volumes of steam, filling the room with a moist heat, which would seem to those unaccustomed to it absolutely unbearable.

In the villages where the bath is of a less up-to-date quality, the steam is produced by means of heating bricks to a red heat, and then pouring cold water over them, the water being contained in an immense tub standing by the stove. The steam thus produced rises in thick volumes, and fills the bathroom. But be the steam produced how it may, the actions of our friend the peasant remain the same from one end of Russia to the other. Old and young assemble on bath-night, and, naked as their mothers bore them, stand, sit, and lie full length in every conceivable attitude on bench, table, and even floor. Enthusiasm waxes fierce, their faces reflect the keen delight of anticipation which fills their souls, and as the heat of the room gets greater and greater, and the vapour rises and falls in great thick rolls, their spirits rise with it. They dance and sing in the exuberance of their enjoyment, for it would seem that as the pores of their skins are opened by the artificial heat, and provide an exit for all the excrementitious material collected during the past week or fortnight in their bodies, there enters through those same pores a stream of life-giving ether which, coursing through their veins and

reaching the heart's core, engenders a sense of wild exultation, and raises them from their usually melancholy mood to heights of delirious joy, such as one would never dream the solid, apparently inert, passionless *muzhik* capable of.

The twigs are seized, and with shouts of mad glee the peasants—debauched, intoxicated with the superabundance of spirits permeating their whole organism—beat each other mercilessly on head, back, front, and legs. All is chaos—a shouting, revelling mass of human beings, apparently deprived of reason—surging this way, that way; leaping on bench and table, performing the most ludicrous and almost impossible antics—one standing on his head, and shouting at the top of his voice, while others beat him with an energy which one would imagine would be productive of the most intense pain and produce weals that would last for weeks; but no—the scene goes on: this one full length on the floor, while those actually stand upon his prostrate figure and dance a sort of Highland jig; another may be seen running madly against the wall of the bathroom, and butting it with his back, and then rushing again to the centre of the room and executing a feverish

war dance—arms, legs, head, body, moving in every conceivable direction at one and the same time, till finally he falls exhausted, and lies a panting, perspiring, speechless mass on the floor of the reeking bathroom. To this stage all the partakers in this orgy eventually arrive, but only for a few moments are their limbs and lungs deprived of power to act. The final scene is yet to come. Rising *en masse*, with blood-curdling yells they run to the door of the bathroom, fling it wide ajar, and with shouts and screams redoubled, roll in the fallen snow. A minute thus, and with bodies glowing with the exercise, and the blood coursing wildly through their veins, they rush pell-mell back to the heated bathroom, where they sit subdued and rub each other down, *and then again don their discarded, filthy sheepskins, their vermin-infested shirts, their parastically-peopled vestments* of whatsoever kind they may be in the habit of wearing.

Reader, see in this my reason for saying that in a sense the Russian peasants are the superior in cleanliness to our English agricultural labourer. The fact that they thus proceed after a health-giving bath to envelop purity in the garb of

dirt and disease is only one more sorrowful proof of the lack of commonsense, forethought, and initiative so marked in the unfortunate Russian peasant. I need not enlarge on the point, except to say that in many villages throughout Russia to-day — these villages where light is entering and signs of intelligence are beginning to dawn, — in this matter as well as in others improvement may be noticed. In some quarters, in a large oven built especially for the purpose, the sheep-skin coats and the varied wearing paraphernalia are submitted to a wholesome process of baking while the respective owners bathe.

In reference to these peasants, one may justly say that amongst the peasants of the wide world they have not their equal in cleanliness. And, be it noted, although my remarks so far may seem to have been all on the bad side of the account, I have yet to say that the Russian peasant has points of sterling worth and qualities which may well call for our admiration, for the peasant is a man of contrasts and extremes similar to his own vast country; and despite all his faults, I for one can never fail to pay generous tribute to his unrivalled patience, his

unfailing courtesy, kindness, and hospitality to strangers, his simple faith, and his usually boundless gratitude.

Let us leave the question of the peasant's spiritual food and the methods by which his exterior is made pure, and turn to that sustenance which serves as a physical support. What does he eat? There are four fundamental things in the daily *menu*: *Stchee* (a vegetable soup), small cucumbers or *ogoutzi*, black bread and potatoes; water, or else *kvass*, or maybe *vodka* washes these down. *Stchee* is a mixture of chopped cabbage, barley meal, and salt, together with a modicum of *kvass* — the national drink *par excellence*. Amongst the well-to-do butter and meal are added and perhaps cream, but these luxuries are denied to the peasant.

Kvass is the beverage *par excellence* of the Russian peasant. To make it, one puts a pailful of water into an earthen vessel, into which one shakes two pounds of barley meal, half a pound of salt, and some honey, more or less according to the wealth of the family. This is placed in the evening in the oven with a moderate fire and stirred. In the morning it is left for a time to settle; the

clear liquid is poured off, and it is ready to drink in a few days. Everything is deluged in this in a peasant household. Potatoes, cucumbers, and black bread complete the list of foods. This is the diet on which all feed, all are brought up from the date of their entry into the world. Milk is a luxury, so are eggs, and other meats are rarely indulged in—so rarely, that it may be said that only on such special occasions as marriages or great feast-days does it find its way into the poor half-fed stomach of the Russian peasant.

But we must not forget that great item—the curse of the *muzhik*—*Vodka*, or corn-brandy. A calculation made in 1827 in St Petersburg showed that *vodka* was sold to the amount of 8,000,000 of roubles, which gave to every inhabitant—men, women, and children—20 roubles' worth yearly, or $2\frac{1}{4}$ pailfuls. Exclude the children and the sick, and perhaps foreigners—and the resulting amount of drink will show what perfervid followers of Bacchus the Russians were then. To-day the situation, at any rate amongst the peasantry, has changed, but for the worse. The peasant, as a general rule, loves his bottle of *vodka* first and foremost, and when

dead drunk, either in town or village, it is extraordinary to see the apathy of others at the sight of him rolling from side to side, and every now and then falling full length on the pavement or in the gutter. The village *lavka* or spirit-shop is always filled with a semi-intoxicated crowd of *muzhiks* drinking their hard-won earnings for the benefit of the Russian Government, under whose direct control is the sale of spirits throughout the Empire. During the five years previous to the introduction of the State Monopoly (1890-1894), the consumption of spirits was 286,947,500 gallons; from 1894-1899 the consumption was 304,205,000 gallons; and when the Monopoly was extended to 35 provinces of the Empire, there were sold in that area—in 1898, 83,997,907 gallons and in 1899, 91,746,140 gallons.

The capital spent in establishing the Monopoly up to 1899 yielded a return of 106 per cent and so the drink bill goes up while the morality of the peasant goes down; and the Russian Government continues to derive an immense revenue yearly from the iniquitous traffic, to increase which every possible inducement is laid within the reach of the unfortunate, otherwise neglected Russian peasant.

At the celebration of a parish fête, when the peasant allows himself a banquet of luxuries unthought of at other seasons, the *vodka* bottle will be seen to hold a prominent position. On these occasions we see laid on many *izba* tables milk, butter, eggs, *braga*—a sort of beer (home-made); *kasha*, a dish made of buckwheat and meat of various kinds. *Kvass* is there in plenty, and most conspicuous of all is the *vodka* bottle. The *izba* undergoes a thorough cleaning the day before, a new candle is placed before the family *ikon* in the corner, and on the day itself the peasants are up early, and dressed in their best—the men maybe with their ordinary sheepskins, but perhaps wearing new *sapogys* (long boots reaching above the knees), a vest, coloured blue or red, and a brilliantly tinted kerchief around their necks; the women adorned with a robe of cloth material, coloured purple, orange, blue, or striped with divers hues; a similar gaudy scarf around the neck, and another broad napkin, ranging in colour from pink, green, red, to sober dark blue or grey, tied as a substitute for a bonnet round their heads; earrings in every case adorn the ears.

Dinner is served at midday, after an interminable service in the church, an almost invariable prelude in Holy Russia to an event of any secular nature. The family, and perhaps guests, sit round the table, and literally fill themselves till they physically are powerless to eat more; but it is the fashion, handed down by time-honoured tradition, for my host to urge them to recommence with the words: "I prithee sit down, that the fowls in the farmyard may breed, and the chickens and bees may multiply."

The invitation is never refused; *vodka* goes round yet again, and eating is started afresh with a zest of which only a half-starved Russian peasant is capable. The majority of the men at least get drunk, but the most striking and indeed the most disgusting orgies are to be seen at the time of the big festivities after a long fast.

Seeing the poverty of the peasant's diet throughout the year, it would seem cruel and absolutely superfluous to subject him to a multitude of fasts, as if it were not a recognised fact that the Russian peasant's life is in reality one long fast, interspersed with bestial oases

of debauchery, which leave his anatomy in a worse condition than it was before; but that all-powerful organisation, the Holy Orthodox Church, demands that he should be yet further deprived of food; and so the wretched peasant fasts rigorously for fourteen days in June, seven weeks in Lent, from the beginning of November till Christmas, and every Wednesday and Friday throughout the year, although I must remark from personal observation that these Wednesdays and Fridays are not so rigorously observed (at any rate, the Wednesdays) as the clergy would wish.

The chief periods during which these Fasts and Festivals are celebrated are — that devoted to the Feast of Masslenitsa, or Butter Week, previous to the great Lent Fast, the Fast itself, the grand Easter Festival, and Christmas week.

Let us peep at a village during the Feast of Masslenitsa. Merrily ring the church bells, and multitudes of sleighs with gaily dressed occupants singing uproariously, and playing the concertina or *balataïka*, pass to and fro, drawn at the gallop by horses excited by the persuasive cries of the semi-intoxicated drivers. The first four days the villages keep to themselves, and

the feasting, so to speak, goes on at home. The peasant's belly is his God, and he does not cater for guests outside his immediate circle of relations and cronies. He feeds with a vengeance unknown to ordinary mortals. He fairly gives himself up to an orgy of meat and drink during these first four days, and if merry, is merry indoors or strictly within the precincts of his village. Butter is the most prominent delicacy, and is literally absorbed in masses, in view of the fact that for seven long weeks nothing but *oil* must be used in its stead. So our friend makes a frantic attempt to provide a granary in anticipation of the drought enforced by the Church. The favourite dish is called *blinni*, a kind of pancake baked in butter and served in a sauce of melted butter.

The last three days of the feast Bacchus breaks loose, and, seated in every sleigh, careers over the surrounding country—the peasant in merry mood, and throwing cares and economy and all thoughts of the future to the winds, driving with wife and children here and there to the neighbouring villages, where open house is kept by every representative of the *muzhik* class. Every village

is gay with the scene. Horses with dignified, leisurely walk pace up and down, drawing their merrily-singing occupants; the air is rent with singing, shouts, and salutations, by no means lacking in native wit, sharpened by the aid of the all-powerful Bacchus. All are in a happy state of alcoholic exuberance, but the prelude to the real "fun of the fair."

On Friday night all go to bed early to prepare for the two final and most important days of the feast—Saturday and Sunday. On these two days, feasting, driving, dancing, and drinking—especially the latter—reach their height, the amount of *vodka* (which I must inform my readers is of two sorts: (1) containing 57 per cent. crude spirit; (2) 40 per cent. crude spirit) consumed being enormous. The peasants dance, sing, and drink, and then drive madly through the village, returning again only to quench their apparently inexhaustible thirst. Every *izba* has its table laid with *vodka* and provisions, and every one is free to enter and imbibe to the full, to his heart's content.

On Sunday night the orgy approaches to its extreme height. All form circles, and dance and drink, drink and dance, till, as midnight approaches

King Vodka reigns supreme. Many are too intoxicated to do anything but roll helplessly and idiotically about, embracing all and sundry, the while they shout "*Slava Bogoo*" ("God be praised"), and kiss one another frantically, swearing eternal friendships, finally endeavouring to dance a jig, and falling inert masses of human flesh *sans* thought *sans* sight, *sans tout*, into the snow, whence they are dragged either by comrades less drunk, or else by their female relatives, who, as a general rule, do not partake to such excess.

At 11.30 the church bell is tolled by the priest as a warning to his flock that the end of the feast is near. Previous to this has the bell been tolled at 5 P.M., and I can vouch for it that the flock answered to the warning note pealed by the priest with a will, drinking deeper, deeper, deeper, and becoming more wildly excited at the thought that but a few hours remain. But from 11.30 P.M., when the bell begins tolling, and continues to toll till midnight, when it ends abruptly, the orchestra of the Holy Church, as it were, playing for Bacchus and the devil, the scene absolutely beggars description. Pandemonium reigns, and all thoughts of morality,

or propriety, or decorum, are thrown broadcast to the winds. All give themselves up to an unbridled bestial orgy, till clang, clang, clang goes the big bell, tolling the hour of twelve, the hour ordained by the Church for the feast to cease, and with it the gaiety, the dancing, the drinking—all.

From that moment till Easter, seven long weeks, must the peasant fast. Flesh, fowl, milk, eggs, butter, sugar, and in the last week and on every Wednesday and Friday, even fish is denied him; but this is not really of such great significance, seeing that his means will not, as a rule, permit him to purchase it. Those who are very strict practise total abstinence during the three days previous to Easter Day. All drinks except water are forbidden.

Every day of those seven weeks is the bell tolled at 9 A.M., to warn the peasants of their solemn duty. They hardly need the warning, poor wretches; the fear of the Church and its mandates is pitiable and degrading to behold; and if a peasant transgresses, and is discovered, he must spend two hours daily during the fast on his bended knees, crossing himself before a

holy *ikon*, and in addition pay so much to the Church, and live for ever under the fear that he may be excommunicated, and his soul sent to perdition. Instances are legion in which the priest has dunned unfortunate peasants driven by want to break their fast, and has deprived them of their very necessities "for the altar of God," as he calls it, a term too often synonymous with his own stomach.

One day only during the fast — Palm Sunday — is the diet permitted a certain amount of elasticity; but other than that, these wretched people, notwithstanding their usually meagre diet, have now to subsist on a pabulum even more inadequate. On the eve of Palm Sunday the peasants form a grand procession, and march to the church, carrying branches and gleefully singing, in imitation of Christ's entry into Jerusalem. The priest burns incense and sprinkles the branches with holy water, and then the people file out, taking their palms to their own homes, where they are hung up over their beds during sleep, on the supposition that good will accrue, evil spirits be driven away, and foul diseases cured. Mass takes place early on Palm

Sunday, and the youthful peasantry take an unholy delight in searching for these lazy ones whom sleep has detained from the ceremony. These custom permits them to chastise with their branches, the while they chant in sing-song strain the words, "Berba biot, biot da floss, Ya ne biot, Berba biot" ("The rod strikes—strikes to tears—I strike thee not—the rod strikes.")

On the arrival of Passion Week, the last week of the fast, preparations commence for the grand Easter Festival, and anticipation amongst the peasants runs high. Holy Thursday sees every church in Russia thronged with people holding tapers in their hands whilst listening to the Mass read by the priest. The peasantry literally squander sums of money on their tapers, some beautifully ornamented, costing one to two roubles (4s. 2d.). These they keep alight on Thursday, and extinguish on Good Friday, rekindling them again at midnight on Easter eve, when the peasantry march *en masse* from one village to another, producing streams of illumination, wandering hither and thither throughout the night.

On Good Friday a representation of our

Lord's coffin is made, covered with a cloth, on which Christ's Body with the wound is painted, while in and out stream masses of people wailing and moaning, surging this way and that way, evincing the most poignant grief as they struggle to kiss the painted design on the coffin.

On Saturday all is quite as the grave. There are no services in the church — priests are undiscoverable; all are tired with the long period of fatigue, all resting, all preparing for the great celebration.

Towards midnight the scene changes: the priest arrives at the church, the people throng in after him, till there is room to do nought else but stand while Mass is performed; but enthusiasm is not yet awakened. Suddenly the hour of midnight strikes upon the ear, the bell tolls, the doors of the Holy Sanctum of bronze or gold open wide, disclosing the Holy of Holies, and the priest standing in the midst of thick volumes of incense-laden vapour. Simultaneously the tapers in the church and in every man's hand are kindled, and light fills the sacred edifice. The church shakes with the tremendous shout of all in unison, "*Christos Vosskross*" ("Christ is risen"),

and the chant to the same words breaks forth in magnificent harmony, with an effect such as can only be produced by the voices of Russians singing in unison. The pall is removed from the coffin, and as the priest passes through the church, swinging the golden censor over the bowed heads of the people, to the expressive and moving vocal strains of the choir, the congregation goes wild with enthusiasm—they become intoxicated with emotion; embrace all and sundry, friend and foe, known and unknown. Delirium reigns! In all parts of the church may be seen peasants kneeling, lying at full length, regardless of the trampling feet, the frantically surging masses kissing the pavement, the feet of Christ on the numberless *ikons*, the shrines; and, finally, the weeping, joyous crowd sweeps in resistless streams—as the rolling, overwhelming ocean waves—towards the entrance to the Holy of Holies, where the priest stands ready to bestow on each a kiss and a blessing.

The Church then empties, but only to refill at four o'clock in the morning with masses of people bringing their first meal after the long fast to be blessed of the priest. Sugar, meal,

fruit, cheese, eggs, butter, what not are crowded into the edifice, till it looks like nothing so much as a huge market-place packed with viands. The priest passes round sprinkling holy water on all sides, and urgent are the requests for this or that food to be specially blessed. "*Batooshka* (father), for the love of God bestow your blessing on my loaves"—my meat, and so on. The peasants then return home, and having tasted of that which for seven weeks has been denied them (*vodka* is with seven-tenths of the peasants the first of the forbidden fruits to be indulged in), they sleep till the sun rises on Easter morn. Then one and all give vent to what might well be called a festival of kissing. Every one kisses every one else. It is the same everywhere in Russia. Easter morn sees kissing being carried on on a scale which defies description. High, low, rich, poor, all kiss one another. Strangers kiss promiscuously, and embrace *ad lib.* on this joyful morn, and no one is denied.

Eggs are a great feature of the Easter Festival. Eggs are everywhere. It is impossible to look anywhere without seeing an egg; and these

articles of consumption, most tastefully painted, and decorated with ribbons, contain every conceivable class of provision and liquid. The most enormous one I ever remember to have seen was in Central Russia last year. The egg was about the size of, and of the same shape as, a nine-gallon cask, and this being propped upon a stool was surrounded by a group of peasantry. It was painted white, and adorned with most touching pictures of our Lord's death and burial. My interest was aroused to see the contents of such a huge receptacle, and learn what could produce such expressions of hypocrisy, religious pretence, and gastronomic anticipation on the faces of those sitting round it. I was not long left in doubt. The egg was *tapped*, a tube inserted, and *vodka*—the real god *par excellence* of the Russian peasant—poured in continuous streams into the outstretched glasses.

Vodka holds a great place in the Easter celebration amongst the peasantry. There are, it is true, improvements to be noted in certain districts, more especially where private landowners and philanthropists have been permitted by the Police to take the peasants in hand and educate

them, and there are certain sects, such as that of the Raskolnik, whose members do not touch strong drink; but nothing is more certain than that the love of it is there, and though restrained by many in a most admirable manner during the greater part of the year, on occasion it breaks out with a concentrated force, born of pent-up energy and desire, that changes the otherwise joyous and harmless Russian festivals into orgies of debauchery.

The final ceremony at Easter is the blessing of bread, when the priest distributes bread to the people, pieces being torn from loaves bearing the inscription: "XP . BOC . IHE . MOPMSOVI" (Kristos Boskposs . Jesu Hominum Salvator. Mortui).

These portions of bread are thrown to the waiting crowds of people, and those who obtain a piece with one or more of the letters of the first five words rejoice exceedingly, and deem it a piece of marvellous good luck, bestowing good fortune throughout the year; but those receiving a piece with the letters of the last word grieve terribly, for it is a sign of grave omen, and is taken as an unfailing token of coming misfortune to person and family.



A Village Shrine.



Finally, Recollection Monday—the first Monday after Easter—ends the great Carnival. It is a kind of double lock on the week's celebrations, as if to sate the lusts and passions of all who may still be unappeased, or, as the priests put it, "to satisfy the religious thirst." It is, in fact, the worst day of the whole festival amongst the peasantry. After it there is peace. Indeed, for some days all are worn out with their Herculean labours in the religious and gastronomic line; and it is safe to assert that no part of the peasant's anatomy feels the strain so greatly as the latter apparatus. Many are ill for days, and it has been shown in some statistics published about ten years ago by a well-known physician, that the mortality amongst the children and young babies after the Easter celebration is doubled. What wonder, when into stomachs which for seven weeks have had literally nothing supplied to them, is bundled all kinds of messes and liquids, regardless of age or condition! One hardly knows which to censure most severely—the excessive fasting or the excessive feasting. The main point to be noted is that it is the Church which is to blame.

What other interesting ceremonies may be

G

observed amongst the Russian peasantry? Not the least fascinating are those relating to Marriage, Death, and Baptism; and this little work would not be complete without a sketch of these important ceremonies.

Customs, especially as regards Marriage, vary with different regions throughout Russia, and I shall endeavour to touch on the ceremony connected with the mystical function amongst, respectively, the Russian, Lett, Esthonian and Ukraine peasantry—all, it must be noted, in the general sense Russian peasants, but divided by customs, origin, and dialect.

When a Russian youth has arrived at the mature age of eighteen, his parents begin to look about them, “for,” say they, “it is time that Ivan, our blessed son, brought us another helping hand, another breadwinner. We must provide him with a wife.” The son may have no particular inclination to be encircled with the bonds of matrimony—but that is a detail; the capability for labour and the power of production is the first thing to be considered in the opinion of the Russian peasant; and it is natural that he should think so, for, from time immemorial, it has been the custom for the

proprietors—that is to say, up till the time of the Emancipation in 1861—to distribute wives to his peasantry, as he might dole out allotments ; and though Serfdom is a thing of the past, the custom has not failed to leave its indelible impression on the minds of the present generation, and so to-day we find the old practice kept up, but in a slightly different form, and without the intervention of the proprietor.

The father of a lad of eighteen begins to observe the girls of the village, his keen eye endeavouring to single out that wench who is strong of wind and limb ; and as if to aid the seeker after a spouse and his prospective daughter - in - law, festivals are arranged in some parts of Russia, which are a kind of mixture of market - cum - drinking bout. To this drive men, women, girls and lads from all the villages round, and during the day the girls, chaperoned by their mothers and dressed in their best, walk up and down the main street of the large village where the fête is being held, employing all the arts which God has given to women, literally “showing their steps,” and seductively glancing at the multitude of husbands-to-be, who stand in groups with their fathers

watching the scene. Jests fly fast and frequent, and wit is not absent. From both sexes come shafts of criticism regarding the respective merits of those who aspire to marriage; and many of the remarks, as may be imagined in an assembly of uncultured peasantry, are not lacking in "breadth." "Show your ankles, Anastasia, and give us a look at your feet." "Thou'lt feel them soon enough on thy unwilling back, thou son of a dog," retorts the young lady. "That's the hair I should like," says another, referring to a head of hair of beautiful auburn tint. "What's the use of hair to you, fool, when you haven't a head to put it on?" "You come with me, I'll protect you," says a third. "You," replies the girl, with a look of withering contempt; "why, it would take six of you to protect me,"—and so the fun goes on. But the most striking fact is, that at the end of the day but very few of those girls are not pledged to be married; and one sees in many cases lads of eighteen, their faces a mixture of shyness and pride, grasping by the hand their new-found treasure, as if she were some great Christmas toy, while she, on her side, stands, as is prescribed by custom, demure, with head cast down, affecting to

be overcome by the position in which she finds herself, but which she in reality has prepared for and discussed during the past three years.

But this custom of choosing a wife is practically only to be found employed in the Western provinces, at least so far as I have been able to observe from my own personal experience.

As a general rule, when the son has arrived at the prescribed age, much secrecy is manifested. The father goes from house to house in the village, or in other villages round about, and visits the crowd of hoping mothers with marriageable daughters. The daughters are paraded for his benefit, and he makes mental notes of their charms and capabilities—the charms, be it said, having the minimum of weight with him in the choice of a wife for his son. He, in fact, wants a girl who will be an actual addition to the working establishment, a girl who can sew, knit, spin, cook, weave, and work in the fields. If with all these accomplishments Nature has endowed her likewise with a pretty face, then the young man for whom she is destined may consider himself fortunate indeed. Further, with the girl must come a dower in the shape of a cow, pig, sheep, according

to the wealth of the family ; and over this item the discussion is very protracted and subtle.

The father, having discovered that particular blend of capability and beauty which he deems the type *par excellence*, invites the mother of the charming young creature to pay a secret visit to his *izba*, and inspect casually the "jewel," as he invariably describes his son, whom he is doing her daughter the honour to offer as her husband. This is duly carried out. A day is arranged for the private view, and the mother, on tiptoe with curiosity and bursting with impatience, arrives at early morn at the *izba* of her prospective son-in-law ; and during that day, and especially whilst the big meal, which is the event of the day, is going on, she observes the lad carefully, and is plied with a multitude of assurances by his mother and other relatives as to his wonderful qualities. The lad is supposed to know nothing about the matter, and indeed, as far as arguments go, takes no part in the deal ; and indeed how should he ? He has not seen his future bride, and does not know what she is like, so, although he is very well acquainted in reality with the significance of the proceeding, he is con-

tent to sit and let others do the bargaining and arguing, for he knows not whether he wants the particular girl in question or not, and is powerless to influence the decision one way or the other.

One point must be made very clear, viz. that there are no legal obstacles in the way of blood relationship, for the rules of the Russian Church are very strict on this point. Cousins may not marry, and when one states the fact that the relationship created by being godfather or god-mother is considered equal to consanguinity, one has said enough to show the intricacies attending the nuptial deal. For deals they are and nothing else; there is no sentiment about your Russian peasant wedding.

When all is arranged, the mother of the prospective husband proceeds with other women, under the cover of darkness and by a circuitous route, to the house of the bride-elect. Arriving, she knocks three times, and the parents of the girl who are expecting the visit open the door, and inquire in feigned curiosity what brings them there at that hour. Says the mother: "We fain would eat." They are cordially invited in, and then begins the following quaint system of question and answer.

Says the mother: "I have a son, a very Hercules, able to plough three times as much ground as any other man in the village. He is comely and tall, and all the unmarried girls in the village desire him for a husband; but I have heard from afar that here in this house is a beauteous maiden of seventeen summers, with eyes as a gazelle, and hair as the golden tresses of the *Roussilki* (water fairies), and bosom as white as snow. Rumour says she is possessed of all the virtues, is good, pious, and that she was born when the sun shone; further, that she can sew, cook, knit, weave, and spin, can milk the cows, and work like any man upon the fields. I prithee show me that beauteous maiden, for I fain would have her as wife for my son."

The mother of the girl replies that she was not aware that her daughter was so accomplished, but she will send for her. And here ensues a most amusing ceremonial.

Ten or a dozen young maidens have been collected in the house for the occasion, and one after the other these are brought in and paraded before the eyes of the visitors, on the pretended supposition that they are the daughters of the

good housewife. One after another they are rejected, and with much grief the visitors profess to be about to depart when the mother of the bride-elect says: "Stay, I have a damsel I had forgotten ; I will bring her here," and hastily disappearing, she ushers into the room the blushing maiden. Immediately she is recognised as *the* one, and amidst floods of tears she stands, the cynosure of all eyes, whilst she is informed of her destiny. Her lamentations fill the house, it being the custom so to do ; but there and then the marriage deed is verbally arranged, and the day fixed. Feasting is carried on then throughout the night, and on the following day both youth and maiden are escorted by different routes to the house of a relative, where, through a key-hole or hole in a door, they are each permitted a view of their future partners throughout life. It is but transitory—a prolonged gaze is inadmissible, and for any conversation to take place is an impiety unheard of. This is the one and only glimpse that the bride and bridegroom obtain of each other previous to the wedding morn.

On that day they proceed in separate procession to the church. Frequently the bride has

to be carried there, for it is considered *chic* to profess to be overcome with poignant and loudly - expressed grief; and often the bride struggles violently in the hands of her comrades—an interesting relic of the old barbaric days when every bride was, as a rule, carried off by force from the maternal nest. Consequently to-day the bride sheds streams of tears, and pleads most touchingly and with the greatest eloquence to be permitted to postpone her marriage and remain unfettered by the nuptial bonds.

But her expostulations are of no avail, and invariably the blushing pair arrive at the church, where crowns made of tin and wreathed with flowers are placed upon their heads as they stand in front of the altar. The service is then performed, and then frequently the custom is indulged in by both of drinking from a metal flagon. When empty, it is thrown down by the last drinker on to the floor, and the one who stamps on it first is recognised as the master for the term of their married life. But as the man always drinks last, and throws it where he will, he invariably stamps on it first. The bride is then conducted to her husband's

house, and is adorned with plumes of feathers, handkerchiefs, and ribbons.

The bridegroom's *izba* is bedecked with corn grass and branches of fir and birch, together with festoons of red, black, and yellow berries. The bridegroom now presents the bride with a packet of needles and thread, as a sign of what he expects from her during their married life, namely, to sew and knit, and attend to his wants. In her turn, she presents him with a whip, in token of submission to him as lord of all—again a barbaric relic of the old mediæval times, when a woman did not consider herself really loved of her husband unless she was regularly chastised on the very smallest pretext.

I have been witness of a yet more curious custom which is now not universal, but which is still extant in many remote parts of Russia, and is worthy of description. The bridegroom dons his long *sapogys* or Wellingtons, and places in the depths of one a whip, and in the other money. Then, summoning his bride, he orders her to pull off one of the boots. If she withdraws that one containing the whip, she is subjected to chastisement with it there and

then, and the fact is taken as a recognition on her part that she must, during the rest of her life, submit herself unconditionally to him as lord and master. If, on the contrary, she withdraws the boot containing the money, the latter is hers, and she is permitted a great deal more freedom than she would otherwise have enjoyed ; but to-day the custom, although practised, has no significance, and is only kept up in deference to tradition. A feast follows invariably, at which the bride gives way to weeping, while there arises alternately a weird chorus from the married women present, praising the pleasures of youth and lamenting mournfully the pains and trials of matrimony ; and then a joyful chant from the unmarried girls, vaunting the pleasures and happiness of unmarried life. The men eat and drink till they have no remembrance of the ceremony that has brought them together. Then the bride is taken away on a sleigh bedecked with bunches of feathers and adorned with merrily tinkling bells. On the second day is the feast proper, and on this day the bridegroom places his wife opposite to him at table ; they act the part of host and hostess for the first

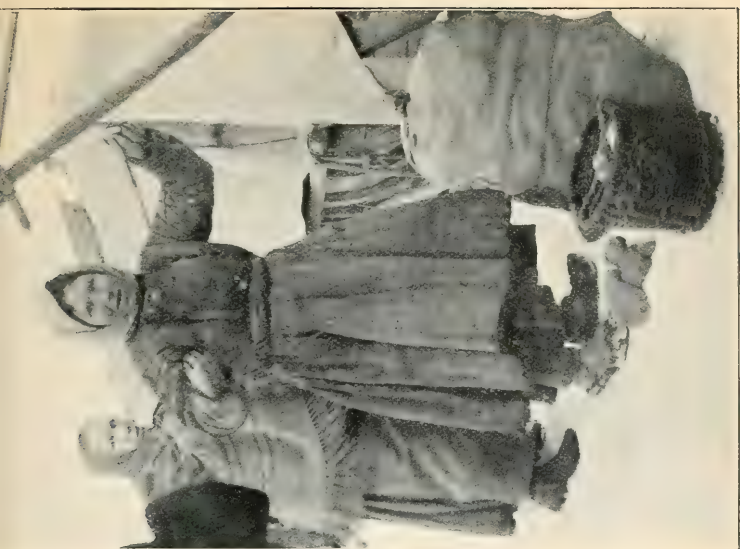
time. Toast after toast is drunk, and finally all depart, leaving the pair to their own devices.

Let us now take a journey to Southern Russia, over the boundless steppe which stretches from the Carpathians and the borders of Hungary to the Great Wall of China, and make our way to the Ukraine. Crossing the steppe in spring and autumn, we see luxuriant herbage; in winter drifting snows massed to great depths in some spots, and in others covering the soil with but a thin mantle; in summer, clouds of dust envelop one, but it is so excessively fine that even on the very calmest day it hangs suspended in the air, having the appearance of vapour rather than solid particles raised by atmospheric disturbance. Trees there are none—a fact remarkable on a soil so rich; but countless herds of horses and cattle roam wild over the limitless plains, and it has been said that a calf may eat his way from the Carpathian Mountains to the Chinese Wall, and arrive there a well-fattened ox.

Wherever a ridge of hills occurs of sufficient height to afford protection against the northern blasts that come sweeping in an unbroken course from the shores of the Arctic Ocean, the character of the country is changed.

In the Crimea, for instance, though the northern portion partakes of all the rude characteristics of the steppe, the south coast, sheltered by the central mountains, enjoys a climate equal to that of Italy, and allows the vine and the olive to be cultivated with as much success as in Provence. During the long winter of the steppe all the energies of Nature seem sunken in sleep, but across the white desert sweep the most terrible of snowstorms known on this planet.

The Russian people distinguish three classes of snowstorms. A snowstorm which is formed by snow that simply falls in a natural way from the clouds is called a "*Myattyol*." A storm which sweeps the already fallen snow from the ground, and drives it hither and thither, is called a "*Zamet*"; but that species of snowstorm which combines both characteristics, which not only falls from the clouds in sheets, but, aided by a terrible wind, gathers up whole massive drifts in its grasp, and propels it high in the air as a mighty whirlpool and hurls it in all directions—that is termed a "*Vinga*," and is dreaded of all men. None dare face the terrible *vinga*, and those luckless people and cattle caught in its cruel grasp rarely emerge alive.



When the snow melts on the steppe Spring may be said to have begun, and the melting season takes place. The steppe becomes a sea of mud. Then, as if by magic, follow on the track of the mud a magnificent, luxurious herbage, and dotting the surface of the plains one sees hyacinths, tulips, and crocuses showing their delicate heads, and filling the air with their wondrous fragrance. An old writer has said:

“The whole earth seems clad in the colour of Hope, while the sky assumes that of Truth; and though it is certainly monotonous to behold nothing but blue above and green below, yet the recollection of past hardships makes the season one of rejoicing to the native and excites the admiration of the stranger. Not a hill to break the tedium of the landscape, through which a well-mounted rider may gallop hundreds of leagues, and scarcely meet an object to make him conscious that he has quitted the spot whence he has started. From Hungary he may urge his steed to the borders of Circassia without passing a grove of trees. From the Carpathians to the capital of Mongolia he will not once be gladdened by the sound of a stream. Grass, grass, grass, nothing but grass.”

Given a brilliant summer, we have conditions

even transcending in cruelty the African Sahara or the South American prairies, for in neither of these does the moisture so completely disappear from the soil. In the African desert may always be found little providential pools of water, surrounded by a cluster of date-trees and luxuriant shrub; but on the Russian steppe the fitful streams flow midst the grass, while from the parched and gaping earth not even a cactus or an aloe peeps forth into which a thirsty animal might bite to moisten its lips with the juice.

Let us pass rapidly across these arid steppes to Little Russia and the country of the Ukraine, and witness our peasants marrying and giving in marriage there.

A few words regarding the meaning of the word "Ukraine" must be inserted here, that one's readers may understand the signification of the term in its relation to the Russian peasant.

In ancient times, when the ruling Grand Duchy of Russia had its capital in Kieff, the whole of Little Russia may have been united under one sceptre. After the fall of the old Duchy, a number of smaller principalities were formed—in Galicia, Vladimir, and Tchernigoff. These in

time became a prey of the Tartars and the Poles—of the latter especially, who, after the decline of the Tartar Empire, gradually seized the whole of Little Russia. Oppressed by the Poles, numbers of the Little Russians — the unmarried particularly — young men capable of bearing arms (*Kasakki*), wandered forth to the mouths of the Dniester, Don, and Dnieper, where they fought and plundered, partly on their own account, partly in the pay of others — Tartars, Turks, Poles, Great Russians.

By degrees these Kasak or Cossack colonies spread themselves over the whole steppe to the south, as far as the Volga and the Ural, and one Cossack colony, under Yermak, conquered Siberia. As the empire of the Muscovites developed itself, the Kasaks became united with them, and now all own their sway, except a few beyond the Danube, who still serve the Padishah. Under those Tzars who drove back the Poles to the West, many of the Cossacks were formed into regiments, and established on the frontier or *U Kraïna* to defend it against the latter.

These Cossack settlements grew to be big

towns, and the Muscovites soon overstepped those border limits; but the name of Ukraine still remains to that long strip of Little or Malo-Russia. Further, the Poles called *their* borders, fortified against the Turks and Tartars, the Ukraine, so that the name came to be used for all that portion of the country to the south of Kieff. Most of this country is now classed as Little Russia, but the name of Ukraine still exists, and may be called that tract of country including and lying to the south of the Government of Kharkoff. Indeed, Kharkoff is officially styled the "Capital of the Ukraine."

It is to this country that I wish to transport my readers, to witness a peasant wedding. There stand the embarrassed pair—a peasant lad with his young bride-elect, and a crowd of musicians surround them, ready to play the nuptial strains throughout the livelong day. The musicians are accompanied by a master of the ceremonies, bearing a white wand, this personage being a never lacking item of the Ukraine or Malo-Russian wedding. All are decorated with gay flowers—pinks, lilies, asters—and following the bridegroom comes a lovely maiden, carrying a

sword thrust through a loaf of bread—a symbol of connubial life never absent from these peasant ceremonies. This custom had its origin in the olden days, and was the means by which the bridegroom expressed to his love that he would defend her through thick and thin, and provide her with sustenance. Dinner soon follows the assembling of the guests and chief participants, and during this repast the cymbals, tambourines, and perhaps the *balalaïkas*—a species of guitar—are hard at work. Now the procession forms anew, the dinner being ended, and the all-important ceremony is performed in the church.

On emergence from the edifice, dancing becomes universal, and the music creates a deafening din, while all sing in chorus, and in the most beautiful harmony, the numerous ballads and ancient songs for which the Ukraine is so noted.

The chief dance is called the *Kasatsha*, which is danced by one couple only at a time. The dancer selects his partner, and proceeds to execute a series of seductive motions around her, while she demurely hangs her head, refusing for a while to be seduced by his allurements of glance and gesture. At length she thaws, and

begins to move in harmony with his most graceful movements. They bend and bow together, and swerve from side to side, the while performing a multitude of dainty gestures, depicting timidity and embarrassment, till finally from shy, half-tearful expressions of love, and fleeting glances from under their long eyelashes, they proceed to gaze with eyes expressive of the most burning devotion into each other's faces. Now the dance waxes fierce and fast; in and out they circle, and turn and twist, ever now and again reverting to that crouching posture so commonly seen in the dances of the peasantry all over Russia. Finally, they meet in close embrace, and whirl with incredible rapidity round and round till, thoroughly out of breath and dizzy from their efforts, they sink exhausted on a friendly bench.

Enthusiasm reaches its height when the but lately married couple walk into the ring, and in their turn display their agility. Finally, all the girls of the village join hands, and indulge in that most graceful of Russian dances, the *Vesnänka*. The bride acts as leader, determines the varying figures of the dance, and is followed by her

companions. Intricate mazes—in and out—now in a straight line, now curving this way, now that, now with their pretty feet in air, now with their heads of varied tinted hair sweeping the grassy sward, and then, with a simultaneous movement and with the most exquisite grace and dainty gestures, they crouch to the double upon their bended knees, and first this pretty ankle, adorned with coloured hose, and then the other protrude in quick succession, while petticoats and under garb of many and varied hue, ranging from brilliant red to purple and vivid green, are mincingly drawn aside displaying a well-turned leg and shapely calf.

The gay scene goes on till fall the shades of night, then comes another feast, and the festivities are over.

“How different to the other Russian wedding!” you will say. True, but this is Southern Russia, please remember, and not the melancholy North. Russia, as I have said before, is a land of contrasts undreamed of by people outside its borders, and, to a great extent, unknown even by the Russians themselves.

I shall but briefly touch on the subject of

baptisms amongst the peasantry. Baptism follows very soon after the birth of the child. At the ceremony, seeing that the little morsel is, so long as it is unchristened, a heathen, the priest first requires it to renounce the devil and all his works. This the baby is naturally unable to do, so the godfather and godmother do it for him, and the church door is opened, that the devil having been dismissed may escape without further contaminating the edifice. The priest turns round and spits at the retreating devil, and the rest of the people then spit likewise, and a prayer from the priest follows.

The child is now in a neutral condition, and it is a problem to which kingdom his soul belongs. The evil spirit has left him, but the good spirit has not yet taken possession. Now follows the immersion. The whole party, preceded by the priest and the godfather, make a solemn pilgrimage round the church three times, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Then the priest consecrates the water and puts a metal cross in it, afterwards immersing the child three times, again in the three sacred names, and lastly bestowing the baptismal name. Then a clean and new white vestment is placed round the child,

the priest previously holding the child and the garment on high, and saying: "Thou, child, art now as clean from evil as this shirt!"

No Russian has more than one name. This custom rests upon the belief that each name has its representative in heaven, who is the guardian angel of all bearing that name. It is impossible therefore, they say, that any one should bear two names, because he cannot have two protecting angels, *i.e.* he cannot serve two masters.

After the third immersion the child is a Christian, as a visible sign of which fact the priest suspends a small metal cross to the neck by a black string, and this is kept round the neck as a protective talisman throughout life. The baby is then dressed, the procession is repeated, burning tapers are carried before the child, and it is then anointed with holy oil—body, eyes, ears, mouth, hands, feet—and from four places on its head the priest cuts a piece of silky hair. This is rolled up with a little wax into a ball and thrown into the font.

Amongst the Esthonians a piece of asafoetida, which is looked upon as a charm, is hung round the neck of a newly-born child, and is believed to be productive of most beneficial effects.

Let me just revert to the subject of weddings, to relate briefly the customs of the Esthonian peasants in connection with the ceremony. The young girls begin their preparations for marriage while yet mere children. They often weave and spin for ten years to supply themselves with a sufficient number of stockings and handkerchiefs, etc., for a wedding dowry. Offers of marriage are made, not by the lover himself, but by some friend of his, or by her parents, who enter the house of the bride bearing meal and brandy. On their entry the bashful maiden hides herself. The lover's proxy opens his proposal by inviting the inhabitants of the house to drink, and relating the story of a lost lamb or foal which he is seeking. If they refuse the invitation, and declare their ignorance of the lost cattle, it is a sign that they decline the offer. If they mean to accept it, they drink with the suitor, and give him leave to look about for his lost lamb. When found, the bride also drinks, and after a few days the bridegroom visits her, bringing her presents.

On the wedding day both go separately to the church, and afterwards proceed to the house of

the bride. Some of the women pour a can of beer over the horse's head, and scatter rye over the heads of the bridal couple. The marriage feast is then eaten, and masking and mumming occupy the day. The next day the bride, completely muffled up in sheets and quilts, is taken home to her husband's house. Her brother acts as coachman.

On arriving at her husband's house, she seats herself in her brother's lap, and her mother in due form invests her with the hood and costume of a matron. The bridegroom's hat is then placed over her hood, which she three successive times throws off her head, and receives again in token that she protests against the supremacy of man, but is willing none the less to tolerate it. A slight box on the ear is then given her, in token of the authority of her husband. In the evening she dances once with every guest and receives presents from each, and the day after the wedding night the young wife, attended by all her guests, makes the tour of the house, and sweeps up the hearth by way of initiation into her new duties.

From weddings to funerals. At the burial of a Russian peasant, after the mournful procession,

of the relatives, the priest at their head, through the village, all singing a mournful dirge, they enter the church precincts, and cluster round the grave, where many a quaint usage is adhered to. Parings of the deceased's nails are buried with him in order to assist him to clamber out of the grave up to heaven, and frequently a piece of a ladder is buried also in order to aid in the ascent. Money is sometimes thrown in at the last moment, the idea being that St Peter may be unwilling to unlock the gates of Heaven without a persuader in the form of coin.

The Letts meet death with remarkable calmness, and the night watches of the relatives and friends over the dead body of the deceased recall to memory the funeral orgies of the Irish; the mourning, the singing, the drinking, the mingled grief and merriment, are the same.

Further, the Letts have a day set apart in remembrance of departed souls. On this day they set out a feast for the dead, and place torches by their graves to light them to the banquet. They do no work, but sit cowering together, and fancy every noise they hear to be caused by the ghosts of the dead.

As regards the Esthonians, the old practices and ceremonies of heathenism seem to have been retained amongst them more than amongst any other Lutheran people. All the trees, hills, and dales which were sacred in those days are so now, and many trees of ancient growth are considered by them as the abode of mighty spirits. The Esthonians love to bury their dead far from the consecrated graveyards of Christianity, far from the haunts of man, in the depths of the deep forests, in obscurity and gloom.

Thus the Russian peasant in his native village. Does he vary at all when migration leads him to the town? Necessarily so, but not to any very great extent. One sees him there, his wits slightly sharpened by the town life, and the chief item of his character brought out into relief by this additional source of education is his cunning.

Foreigners of all nationalities are always ready to apply the epithet "rogue" to the Russian, and the Russian trader—that is to say, the usual specimen of the class to be discovered in market or fair—knows that he is classed as a rogue, and so acts up to his reputation. There is no shame about him. If he can get four times

as much as a thing is worth, he will get it, and cross himself religiously, thanking his patron saint. This inborn consciousness of roguery, combined with the universal mania for drink, has a very degrading effect on the morals of the Russian peasant when he wanders to the towns; but with it all he is always contented and polite, and the slight veneer of polish which his life in town and city seems to give him also almost invariably provide a stimulant to his dormant nature, and as an effect renders him throughout the livelong day, as he sells his paltry trinkets and wooden utensils, full of gaiety and even wit.

Listen to a Russian peasant endeavouring to cajole the passers-by into buying his goods: "Come, buy, buy! I am a dreadful rogue; but you cannot get these articles that I sell anywhere in the market. Ha-ha! You smile and think you know all about it; but, believe me, I will cheat you; but you will be satisfied none the less. None can cheat so nicely as I; but you will love me for it, for none in the market can sell a thing which is worth fifty kopeks for two roubles like I can. Come, pretty lady" (this with a seductive smile, which I have never

seen any other people but Russians able to equal), "come, buy my wares. I am Ivan — Ivan Ivanovitch—the old trader that has stood here for years. Buy some trinkets or some fruit for your pretty children. These are English goods. They are really German, but who's to know that? *You* don't know it, and your *friends* won't know it, so buy, and pay me, if you like, as if they were really English goods. You will be more satisfied, and — so shall I. How much are those apples and plums? Why, as I live, for *you*, pretty lady — two roubles. They are Spanish, real Spanish; but that is a lie, of course, for I am a Russian, and all Russians lie. Well, then, don't buy; go elsewhere and pay four roubles. They are only worth one rouble, but I added another. If you had not been a sweet, pretty lady I should have said five. Ah! that's right — take another," as the "pretty lady" buys for herself and children. "*Do Svedaniah* (good-bye). *Tak* (so). They were Caucasian fruits and Russian toys made at the Jewish manufactory at the end of the street. Oh, these pretty ladies! I made one rouble sixty kopeks out of that deal. Come, come, buy my

goods ; I have sold nothing all day, kind gentleman," in a whining tone, altering his method as he gauges the newcomer to be a philanthropist. "Come, kind sir ; buy for the sake of my starving children" — and a tear actually falls down his furrowed, weather-beaten cheeks. The newcomer buys, and when he has departed, our friend the peasant pedlar laughs in glee : "What a rogue I am ! I've neither wife nor children to support, and I've got a stocking full of silver roubles. Oh, what a rogue ! what a rogue ! and what fools the people are !" And so he goes on the live-long day, accusing himself of roguery, knowing full well that his apparent openness only attracts people to him.

But I have given this slight sketch merely to show that the wit of the town peasant is decidedly more developed than his brother of the ploughed field and hamlet. And every stage of progress in the Russian peasant's career reveals in him qualities of which we, seeing him but as a village peasant, would believe him absolutely incapable. It only shows that we do not know what forces for good or evil lie buried in that thick skull.

But my task, beyond making certain deductions towards the close of this little work, is not to dive into the future and surmise what *will* be. I have set out to tell my readers what actually *is*, what holds good to-day, at this very moment, in the peasant villages up and down Russia; and from the slight sketch that I have given of the peasant's life, I trust that those who have sought information may have found it, and that that information has tended towards interesting them in the life habits and customs of that strange individual.

Amongst people holding such primæval and simple ideas as I have described in the preceding pages, one might expect to find traces of some archaic system of living extant amongst them suggestive of old time. One would not be deceived. Russia's peasantry to-day exist under conditions which held good many centuries ago. The principle of the Commune and Mir predominates, notwithstanding all Ukases and Governmental circulars permitting *this* change and decreeing *that*, notwithstanding all laws of recent date regarding the abolishment of this self-same Commune, for the *mushik* is as yet too

ignorant to understand what is done for his good, and has not the intelligence to devise other means of village management more suited to modern requirements and modern civilisation ; and the Government and His Majesty the Tzar may continue to send forth streams of decrees and learned treatises, filling columns in the *Norse Vremya*, and myriads of official documents stamped with the Imperial seal, but the *mushik* will never, except in isolated instances, even hear a rumour of these Imperial dicta, for he cannot read, and the local Bureaucrats take very good care he shall not hear of anything that might make him act in any way prejudicial to their (the Bureaucratic) interests.

Education must come first, and until the Government proceed to give the peasantry *that*, instead of riding rough-shod over them with an iniquitous system of police and soldiery, and until Bureaucracy is once for all time abolished root and branch, nine-tenths of the Russian villages will continue to exist under that hopelessly antique system on which I shall have more to say in another chapter—the Commune and Village Mir.

To give an idea of that organisation, I will but touch on the subject. Each family in the Russian village has a Head or Big One, to whom all look for guidance. To him all matters of a purely family nature are deferred. But the property of the family consists mainly of their house, their kitchen garden, or *ogorod*, and their household goods, together with the implements necessary for agriculture, and any cattle they may be fortunate enough to possess, besides, of course, farmyard animals—poultry, pigs, etc. Again, the heads of each family constitute the Village Council or Commune, and from this group is annually chosen one who is styled the *Starosta* or chief. To this Council all matters of importance are submitted.

All the land belonging to the village is divided up amongst the peasantry at regular or irregular intervals, and it is not only so treated, but it is divided according to quality as well, so that one strip of land which may be richer than another piece is separated out into an infinite number of portions — so much for each peasant family according to its size and working ability — so that each peasant has so much to cultivate; but that land is in no sense

of the word his, as we in England understand the law of property. The Commune decides when he may till it, when he may sow it, when he may reap it; the peasant can neither purchase more land nor sell that which he has, or let it, without the consent of the Mir. In short, progression on the part of a more intelligent peasant who wishes to better himself is absolutely barred. Further, under the Communal system, a man may not leave the village to gain a living elsewhere, or for other purposes, without the consent of this all-powerful community. The system is still further developed, but I shall dwell on it later on.

Enough to know that in the twentieth century such an arrangement holds sway in a country extending over one-sixth of the world's surface; enough to know that superstition, fostered by an ever willing, ever retrogressive Church, dominates the minds of 100,000,000 of God's creatures; that ignorance prevails to an extent that to the civilised mind of Western Europe is absolutely incredible, and makes those who, like myself, have had opportunities of personally coming in contact with it, stand aghast at the bare possi-

bility of such a condition in the twentieth century of the Christian era. We in England must go back to five or six hundred years ago to find a condition at all approaching the ignorance displayed by Russia's masses to-day, and then we should not be able to draw a correct comparison, for Serfdom, thank God, never held sway in England, and consequently the results of that system are not imprinted on the minds and souls, habits and customs, of our free English labourer, agricultural and municipal, as they are in those of the Russian peasant at this very moment.

How is it that this lamentable state of affairs remains to-day? How is it that, while the rest of the world has advanced slowly but surely—north and south, east and west—Russia has stood still or retrogressed, and is to-day, notwithstanding the wishes of the people for a more civilised state of affairs, still retrogressing? Reaction to-day is more a reality than ever it was before. Martial law is extant in numerous towns throughout the Russian Empire; people are shot in dozens at the mere lifting of a finger of an impulsive, ignorant, and reactionary

military official; freedom of the person is a thing unknown, and those who would bring light and education to the Russian peasant are arrested, flogged, and, in many cases, exiled from home and family.

How is this? How *can* this be to-day—1907?

Let us dive into the past, into hoary antiquity, and search for the answer to this problem. Reasons there must be to have enabled this vast country to remain stationary in the race for progress and civilisation, and to have permitted its peasantry, its life-blood, to be sunken, swamped in the darkest ignorance, so that to-day Russia's villages are archæological oases in a world of culture, civilisation, and refinement, and Russia's peasantry antiques, living in a world of their own, centuries behind the time.

CHAPTER II

HISTORY

ANTIQUES! Yes, the Russian *mushik* is a veritable antique. We have but to dive back into the dim past, and see what History has to tell us of the origin of the denizen of the Russian villages of to-day, and should we need further evidence, take spade, pick - axe, and shovel to the plains of Southern Russia, round and about the Black Sea, the land of ancient tumuli or *kurgáns*, which here and there dot the surface of the arid soil.

Only a short while back, while obtaining stones for barracks, by order of the Government, from one of these immense *kurgáns* in the province of Kertch in Southern Russia, some workmen in the process of destruction laid bare a tomb. They entered, and found themselves in the presence of an ancient King and Queen lying in state.

Under a canopy, on a high *daïs*, lay the pair in sarcophagi of wood. The cap of the King was ornamented with two bands; on his neck was a collar of solid gold; his hands were covered with golden rings. Beside him lay his kingly weapons—his sword with a golden handle, his golden sceptre, a shield of solid gold, and a golden bow-case. On the head of his Queen was the same sort of cap with beautiful golden fastenings. Her shapely neck was adorned with golden rings and fine golden medallions, while encircling both was a cloak ornamented with golden plates. The King and Queen were surrounded with numerous vessels of gold and silver, a musical instrument and five statuettes, the bones of an attendant, and those of a horse.

I wish to draw attention to one of these vessels, a vase of beautiful workmanship, on which was depicted with all the skill of the ancient Grecian workmen the figures of soldiery attending to their wounds after a hard-fought battle. The soldiery represented on these vases are identical in dress, features, and method of wearing hair and beard, with the peasant of to-day. Their hair long, their beards flowing on to their chests,

their bodies encased in what look remarkably like sheepskins tied with a girdle at the waist and extending to the knee (short for more freedom of warlike action, no doubt), long *sapogys* or Wellingtons, into which the trousers are tucked—in fact, in every detail of garb and physiognomy similar to the *mushik* of A.D. 1907.

Who were these royal people, buried in such luxury, and surrounded by vessels on which are faithfully reproduced the features and dress of the peasant of to-day?

Herodotus, in describing the tombs of the Scythian Kings, gives us a description almost identical with that which I have given above. Canon Rawlinson discourses on the tomb in his notes to Herodotus, and says that it dates back to B.C. 400-350, that the influence of Grecian workmanship is manifest, but that the treatment is purely Scythian. Professor Morfill concludes that the tomb probably belongs to one of those native kings who from B.C. 438-B.C. 304 held the Greeks of Panticapacum in subjection.

Who were these Scythes? Herodotus tells us that in the fifth century before Christ the Greeks had established colonies on the northern banks

of the Black Sea, and further north still were masses of barbarous people whom the Grecians called uniformly by the name of Scythes. Morfill says: "Of these Scythians, two tribes at least appear to be Slavonic—the Budini and the Neuri; but it is impossible to identify, as do Samokvassoff and others, the whole Scythian race with the Slavs." What we can say with certainty is that the type as seen on the vases previously mentioned shows that they were certainly not Mongolian, as Hippocrates would have us believe, but Aryan.

Further, we know that this race fought, traded, and made treaties with the Ancient Greeks; that they were a powerful, fighting, nomadic race, and were of no mean calibre, successfully defying the powerful and well-trained legions of Darius Hystaspes. They worshipped a drawn sword, and sprinkled it with human blood; they drank the blood of the first victims killed in war, scalped them, and preserved their skulls, and celebrated the deaths of their Kings by the most horrible funeral rites, amongst which may be noted the indiscriminate slaughter of slaves and animals.

Herodotus, dividing the Scythes into three groups, distinguishes the Royal Scythes as the class pre-eminent, who ruled their weaker brethren.

There were other people whom one must mention, for they have a bearing on Russian History, and the origin of the Russian peoples of to-day.

We must note the Melanchleni clothed in garb of black; the Agathyrses, who wore ornaments of gold, and had wives in common; the Issedons, who solemnly ate their deceased parents; the Arimaspes, who had only one eye; the Hyperboreans, who lived in regions where snow fell all the year round; the Griffons, the Thyssagetes, the Massagetes, and the Jyrx, who lived only by the chase, together with the Androphages. Some of these emigrated westwards, and now belong to the great Germanic race; others remain in Eastern Europe, holding the names of Lithuanians, Slavs, and Turks.

Thus authorities identify the Melanchleni with the Esthonians; the Androphages with the Samoyedes; the Arimaspes with the Voliaks; the Massagetes with the Bashkirs; the Griffons with the Mongols; whilst the Agathyrses are probably the Khazars.

We must suppose that these varied peoples lived their lives in such peace as barbarity permits till the fourth century of our era, when the Goths founded a vast empire in Ancient Scythia, which was overturned in due course by the terrible Huns of Attila, who, on their dispersal, were followed by a mixture of peoples—Turks, Fins, Avars, Bulgars, Magyars, Khazars, etc., etc., formed, practically speaking, of the various branches of the ancient Scythian nation.

From this conglomeration extricated itself the Slav, the forerunner of the Russian of to-day. The Grecian historians discourse on him. His race disputed in battle the authority of the Romans in the East. Nestor, the first Russian historian, in the twelfth century gives us details of the geographical distribution two centuries before him of the tribes which, forming a group apart from all other Slavs, have since received the name of the Russian Slav *par excellence*.

At this epoch, between the Russian Slav and the Polish Slav there existed little difference. M. Koulick considers that it is the conquest by two different races of men, the adoption of two rival religions—that of Byzantium and that of

Rome; the influence of two opposed civilisations — the Greek and the Latin—as well as the literatures and two alphabets, which has created, notwithstanding their common origin, two races, that have up to our times remained rivals, and been imbued from generation to generation with the spirit of irreconcilable enmity.

The Slav, moulded by the Liakhs or Lechites, conquered by the Church of Rome and exposed to Western influences, has become the Pole; the Slav, moulded by the Varangians, conquered by the Grecian Church, and exposed to Byzantine influence, has become the Russian; but as to the aborigines living either on the banks of the Vistula or of the Dnieper, they were one and the same race, practising the same traditions, the same Paganism, and speaking almost the same language. The affinities of Russian and Polish idioms, between which the dialects of White Russia, Red Russia, and Little Russia serve as intermediaries, prove sufficiently an original brotherhood, which the rivalry of Churchdom and Governmental struggles destroyed.

Before taking possession of the country to the north and east, the Slav had to struggle against the Letto-Lithuanians, Fins, and Turks.

The first of these was part of the Aryan family, but distinct from the Germanic and Slav race ; from it hails the Lithuanian Lett and the inhabitants of Courland.

The Fins were the origin of the Finnish race, which to-day peoples Livonia, Finland, Esthonia, Lapland. The Permians, the Tyrians, and the Samoyedes, Tcheremisses, Tchouvaches, Votjaks, Bashkirs, and Mordues, all Finnish offshoots, are similarly to-day extant, occupying as a sporadic state these regions which in the ninth century they inhabited in compact masses.

These Tchondes and Fins are indeed the aborigines of Russia ; they form the ethnographic substratum on which has been built the Russia of to-day. The primitive Russians had as a basis for their religion Nature and its phenomena, and worshipped various gods—Dagh Bog, the Sun-God ; Stribog, the Wind-God ; and Morina, the Goddess of Death. Their ancient hymns tell of heroes and spirits, such as Moroz (the Russian word for “frost” to-day), the god personifying the terrible winter cold ; Baba Jaga, an ogress of terrible shape and size inhabiting the forests ; and other spirits good and bad, numbered

amongst which we find those described in the preceding chapter, spirits which have survived the march of Time, and hold these wretched dwellers upon earth in the same uncanny grip as they did far back in the dim, distant ages, centuries ago.

Their customs were barbarous to a degree. Wives refused to outlive their husbands, but burned themselves alive on their funeral pile. Nestor, in classifying their characteristics, states that they were as animals, and that the men and women lived only for bestial pleasure. Polygamy was universal, and women went to the strongest, and were carried away by main force, traces of which custom are, as I mentioned previously, to be seen in the nuptial ceremonies of to-day amongst the Russian peasantry, whilst even in these remote times we have evidence of the existence of a village system of living akin to that of the Commune and Mir, which holds good, in a more advanced form, to this very hour.

The centuries pass, and the Russian Slavs, eternally at enmity amongst themselves, decide to seek a king who shall be worthy to reign over them.

In 862 A.D. Rurik, that scion of the bold Varangian Vikings from the Scandinavian fiords, was humbly implored to come with his bold buccaneers, and make the soil of Russia his own. He acceded to the request, and, arriving with a large force, established himself south of Lake Ladoga, not many leagues from where Petersburg now stands, and built a town, which he called Novgorod. Oleg, his brother, reigned after him, and laid the foundation of Kieff, dedicating it in these words: "This town shall be the mother of Russian towns." He then overthrew all the other branches of the Slav race, and united all the Russian people under his rule.

The origin of the word "Russia" is rather doubtful. Luitprand says: "*Graeci vocant Russos nos vero Normannos.*" Some claim that primitive Russia had its stronghold in Sweden, where they point to a locality called Roslog. The Swedes to-day are called by the Fins "Rootzi," but it is highly improbable that the "Russia" originated in Sweden; it was applied at a very early date to the country of the Dnieper. To come from Rouss or go to Rouss

are expressions met with in very ancient documents, and Rouss signifies here the country of Kieff. However, a very probable derivation is that from "Rosseje," which in Slav signifies "dispersion," expressing the nomadic habits of the ancient Russians. Oleg made two treaties with the Greeks, and in these, the text of which Nestor has handed down to us, we find the word "Rouss" used to designate the people of Russia.

Be the origin of the word what it may, we at any rate know from this time forth in detail the history of the Russian peasant, and we see that his barbarism was polished by the advent of yet another barbaric nation—those Vikings who made their presence known even in England. Oleg dies, and Nestor, the faithful chronicler of the deeds of Ancient Russia, gives us the story of his death.

"And Oleg lived, having peace on all sides, residing in Kieff. And Oleg remembered his horse, which he had entrusted to others to feed, himself never seeing him. For, a long time ago, he had asked the magicians and wizards, 'By whom is it fated that I should die?' And one of the magicians said to him: 'Prince, the horse

which thou lovest, and upon which thou ridest, shall be the cause of thy death.' Oleg, receiving this into his mind said, 'I will never ride the horse nor see him more.' And he ordered them to take care of the horse, but never to bring it to him again. And many years passed, and he rode him no more; and he went among the Greeks. Afterwards he returned to Kieff, and stayed there four years, and in the fifth he remembered his horse, by which the soothsayers had predicted that Oleg would die, and having called the oldest of his grooms, he said: 'Where is my horse which I enjoined you to feed and take care of?' And they said, 'He is dead.' And Oleg laughed and blamed the soothsayer, and said: 'The wizard spoke falsely, and it is all a lie; the horse is dead, and I am alive.' And he ordered them to saddle his steed, for he wished to see the bones of his horse. And he came to the place where the bones and the skull lay unburied; and he leapt from his steed and said with a smile, 'How can a skull be the cause of my death?' And he planted his foot on the skull, and out darted a snake and bit him on the foot, and from the wound he fell sick and died. And all the people lamented with great lamentation, and carried him and buried him on the mountain called Stchekovitsa. There is his grave to this day, and it is called the 'Grave of Oleg.' And all the years of his reigning were thirty and three."



Bleenkoff and his Wife.
(One of Russia's peasant intellectuals.)



The first light of a religious character is shed upon Russia with the advent of Olga. Says Nestor :

“She was the forerunner of Christianity in Russia, as the morning star is the precursor of the sun, and the dawn the precursor of the day. As the moon shines at midnight, she shone in the midst of a Pagan people. She was like a pearl amidst dirt, for the people were in the mire of their sins, and not yet purified by baptism. She purified herself in a holy bath, and removed the garb of sin of the old man Adam.”

This quaint description of the virtues of Olga relates to her journey to Constantinople or Czar-grad (Tzar-gorod, Tzar-town), as the Russians call it, where she embraced Christianity ; but it was left to Vladimir not only to be received into the Christian fold, but to cause his people at the same time to be baptized, in 988 A.D.

Where was our friend the peasant in these times? Had he appeared as a thing apart?

Yes. What we may call the upper classes consisted of the royal Princes, the *Droozhiny* or followers of the Princes, the *Boyars* or barons, the *Mooshi* or men, and the free people called *Loodi*. The lower classes were the peasants, called *Smerdi* (from *Smerdiot*, “to smell bad”),

and *Moojiki*, a disparaging diminutive of *Moozhman*. Beneath these in rank were the slaves proper, consisting of those taken in war, bought or born on their masters' domain. War was, however, the principal source of slaves. It is chronicled that when the Russians made war on a people, they did not leave before destroying the place *in toto*—taking the women captive, and reducing the men to slavery.

Following Vladimir came Jaroslaff, who gave Russia her first code of laws, called the *Russkaya Pravda*, and in this—copies of which are extant—we find that trial by wager of battle and trial by ordeal were the most common way of settling disputes. There was a circuit for judges, and a fixed scale of values for different people according to their rank. Thus for killing a *boyar* or noble, the fine was eighty grivnas, a grivna being equal to a pound's weight of silver. A free Russian's life was worth forty grivnas, and a woman was only worth twenty grivnas. For a blow with the fist or the sheath or handle of a sword, for knocking out a tooth or pulling a man by the beard, the fine was twelve grivnas; for a blow with a club, three.

Prince follows prince, and Russia goes on in much the same way. Vladimir Monomakh or Monomachus ascended the Throne in 1113, and must be looked upon with more than ordinary interest by us, in that he married Gytha, the daughter of our King Harold of England, who was slain at the battle of Hastings.

In these days, strange to say, Russia was on a level with the rest of Europe; but from this time onwards she was gradually to sink behind all other European nations in the race for progress. The English, we find, had no further relations with Russia till the reign of Edward VI., and no further intermarrying was to take place till one of the sons of Victoria became the husband of the daughter of Alexander II.

Vladimir Monomachus has come down to us as an author of no mean pretensions. I give an extract from his account of his own doings in his everyday life in those far distant days. Says he:

“As to me, I accustomed myself to do everything that I might have ordered my servants to do. Night and day, winter and summer, I was perpetually moving about. I wished to see everything with my own eyes. Never did I

abandon the poor or the widow to the oppression of the powerful. I made it my duty to inspect the Churches and the sacred ceremonies of religion, as well as the management of my property, my stables, my vultures and hawks, with which I hunted. I have made eighty-three campaigns and many expeditions. I concluded nineteen treaties with the Polovtsi. I took captive one hundred of their princes, whom I set free again, and I put two hundred of them to death by throwing them into rivers. No one has ever travelled more rapidly than I have done. Setting out in the morning from Chernigoff, I have arrived at Kieff before the hour of vespers. In my youth, what falls from my horse did I not experience! wounding my feet and my hands, and breaking my head against trees; but the Lord watched over me. In hunting, amidst the thickest forests, how many times have I myself caught wild horses and bound them together? How many times have I been thrown down by wild oxen, wounded by the antlers of stags, and trodden under the feet of elks? A furious wild boar rent my sword from my baldrick; my saddle was torn to pieces by a bear. This terrible beast rushed upon my courser, whom he threw down upon me. But the Lord protected me. O my children! fear neither death nor wild beasts. Trust in Providence; it far surpasses all human precautions."

Thus writes the old Slav King, and we seem

to see those ancient days passing as a panorama before our eyes as we read.

These were the happiest days of Russia. Soon she was to fall on evil times, and be submitted to hardships such as no other country in the world has had to run the gauntlet of; soon she was to feel the heavy hand of Oppression in many and varied forms, such as have not failed to leave their indelible mark on the Russian people of our own times; and not only that, but she was to see the inauguration of a period of bondage, under which even to this very hour she finds herself groaning. Poor, unfortunate Russia had hardly begun to feel its way with uncertain, wavering hands from the gloom of barbarism, when, in the thirteenth century, came that terrible visitation which enthralled Russia for two hundred and fifty years, blighted the bud of progress, extinguished the spark of enlightenment, and ground her down under the heel of oppression, leaving her scarred with weals of woe, from which she has never recovered, and which she has never succeeded in healing.

The Mongol invasion, for to this I allude, fell upon Russia as a clap of thunder in 1224.

Genghis Khan, after forty years of hard fighting, had united the Mongol hordes into one nation, and had overrun Manchuria, Northern China, Turkestan, Bokhara, and the plains of Asia up to the Crimea. His lieutenant, Tchépé, thirsting for glory and the praise of his master, marched round the Caspian by its northern banks, crossed Georgia and the Caucasus, and traversing the Russian steppes invaded the Polovtzi. These sought alliance with the Russians, their hereditary enemies, in order to repel them; and the latter, led by the chief princes of the country, joined hands with them, and fought a great battle against the Tartars on the river Kalka, which empties itself into the Sea of Azof. The Russians were defeated with great slaughter, and the Tartar domination had begun.

“God has put them into my hand,” wrote the barbaric General to his master, the terrible Genghis. No truer words were ever uttered. The blossoming Russian nation became a vassal of barbarians, to whom they paid yearly tribute, and by whom, at frequently-recurring periods, they were visited in overwhelming mass—their

towns sacked, their families massacred, and their rulers made to cower with abject humility under their relentless heel.

It surely will be of interest to my readers to learn in brief to what actually Russia had to submit during these centuries of thralldom, for if one wishes at all to understand Russia's position to-day, the character of its people, and the low state of education and morals, it is necessary to ascertain what effect the Tartar invasion had, and how far it is to blame for the condition of the peasant to-day.

Then let us glance briefly at the conditions in which the Russians lived under the Tartar sway. Every Russian prince was compelled to journey to the Far East on his accession to the principality, to pay homage and acknowledge submission to the reigning Khan. All judgments of any serious nature had to be referred to the Khan or to one of his generals for confirmation.

On visiting the camp of their Tartar masters, the Russians were awed by finding there not only Mongolians and Thibetans, but sometimes the ambassadors of the Khalif of Baghdad, of the Pope of Rome, and even the King of France

Han Carpin, Envoy of Innocent IV., says of the Court of Baty Khan on the Volga: "It is brilliant and immense! His army is composed of 600,000 men, of whom 150,000 are Tartars, and 450,000 are foreigners, as many Christians as infidels." And this was but the seat of the Grand Khan's chief General!

The Court of the Grand Khan himself was inestimably finer and more numerous, and to this the wretched Russian rulers had to wend their way, humble suppliants, in terror of losing their heads — and very often doing so. The conquered nation was forced to pay a capitulation tax, which weighed heavily on both rich and poor, for Tartar assessors fixed the sums according to the wealth of the individual. If, in the opinion of these assessors, the Russians did not pay in a given year what they might, word was sent to the Hordes, and immediately Russia was laid waste with fire and sword. Besides the tribute of money and goods, the conquered were compelled to supply their masters with a military contingent. Further, the people dared not have for their Prince a man who had

not received the *Yarlikh*, or letters patent of the Grand Khan, as a sign of his investiture.

To show how this principle, this spirit of degradation, had become engrained in the Russian people, it is only necessary to turn to the chronicles of that ancient city of Novgorod, whose inhabitants were the proudest of all children of the Russian soil. They had elected as their Prince, Michael, but discovering that he had not received the consent of the Tartar barbarian, they rejected him, saying: "We have chosen Michael, it is true, but on condition that he shows us the *Yarlikh*!"

No Russian principality could undertake a war without the consent of the Tartar, and in fact Russia, as a whole, found itself forced to submit her every wish to the Horde for acquiescence in the project.

A few deductions that may be drawn as to the results of this period of vassalage should prove of interest to my readers. What has been the effect as noticeable on the people of to-day? Briefly stated, the Mongol domination bred the autocratic spirit in Russia; it was the direct cause of Autocracy, and indirectly the

mother of Serfdom. Here we have at once the origin of those two institutions which have worked little but harm for Russia.

The invasion, further, separated Russia from the West—from civilisation, from progress, and made it an Eastern dependency, a barbarian's fief. It had an undoubted effect on the character of the people; a free, open, brave, and independent nature cannot possibly be bred of cringing humility. A man bound hand and foot, body and soul, cannot possibly develop character; he develops cunning and intrigue and underhandedness. Karamsin, the great Russian historian, says: "The Princes of Moscow begged the humble title of *slave* of the Khans, in order that they themselves might become powerful monarchs." So that intrigue followed intrigue amongst the petty Russian rulers—anything, in order to obtain the smile and favour of the Grand Khan. Consequently prince was ranged against prince, people against people, which the wily Tartar rulers sedulously fostered, and which bred that germ of distrust betwixt man and man amongst the Russian people which is a trait so noticeable to this day. Meanwhile this

principle of patronage of the Khan to one or other of the Russian princes was gradually leading to that state of things in which one prince held sway over the rest of his brother rulers. Says Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace: "The first Czars of Muscovy were the descendants, not of Russian princes, but of Tartar khans."

Finally one more effect of the invasion must be noted, and this by no means the least. The power of the Church was increased, for the : Tartar, barbarian as he was, yet held the ecclesiastical ceremonies in great reverence, and in many instances attended the Russian fêtes of Easter in state.

Thus we have three institutions which, so far, have worked, balancing the advantages and disadvantages together, an incredible amount of evil, fostered and supported by the Tartar invasion. It would be no exaggeration to say then that that invasion changed Russia and the Russians from what they might have been; the whole nation's character was altered during that terrible two hundred and fifty years, and was impregnated with such degenerate ideas that

it became fitted to receive the further overwhelming blow which the sixteenth century was to bring in its train.

Now are we to see the bonds of the Russian peasant, and indeed the Russian people as a whole, slowly but surely woven; now are we to witness the gradual joining of link to link in the chain of servitude, till finally, say what the Russian apologists of to-day may, the country became without doubt a country of slaves—nothing less.

The sixteenth century emerged from the womb of Time, and disclosed the world of Christendom torn with dissensions and strife. Look where one will, one finds division, sedition, oppression, cruelty — brother against brother, father against children, nations divided against themselves—all torn by conflicting opinions, born of the universally-dawning conscience, and bearing on those greatest of great principles—religion, education, progress, enlightenment, civilisation, and the rights of man. Luther, Wycliff, Calvin, made their names resound through Christian Europe, America is discovered, printing is established, the Tudors reign in England,

Ferdinand and Isabella in Spain, and Louis XI. in France—all the Western nations of the great white race are sweeping in irresistible wave along the path of progress, but Russia remains enveloped in darkness, ignorant of these great events, and absolutely unaffected by them—its main object to exist, its main thought how best to dispose itself under a barbarian heel in order to avoid being crushed.

August 25, 1539, saw the birth of that Prince of Moscovy of evil memory, Ivan the Terrible, a despot whose deeds of devilry have left a blot on Russian history never to be wiped out. In 1543, at the age of thirteen, he began to assert himself during his minority, by having the guardians of his early youth murdered, and Russia already began to have a nameless dread of what the future might have in store for them under the rule of a Prince who bid fair to out-Nero Nero, and perform against his own countrymen fiendish deeds.

Moscow, which had been founded in 1147, was now the Principality to which all owed sway, and the terrible Ivan styled himself "Tzar of all the Russias." The Tartar domination was

weakening year by year, but Russia was passing under a yoke which in reality was ten times worse.

Let us glance at a few of the pages of the life-history of this Ivan, for it is the life-history of Russia, and more especially the Russian peasant.

Ivan was crowned in 1547, and marriage quickly followed. Fifteen hundred of the prettiest girls in the Empire were collected in a vast building in Moscow, and Ivan, accompanied by a courtier, passed from room to room, examining with a critical eye the lineaments and figures of the expectant damsels. His choice fell on Anastasia Kochkin, but the first of some eight to ten wives that graced the imperial couch; but marriage with a delicate woman was not to soften this man's nature. Cruelty was his bent, his first love, his food. Surrounded by a band of blood-thirsty retainers called *Opritchniki*, he was accustomed to sally forth amongst the villages and commit crimes which only *his* imagination could give birth to—men were massacred, women outraged, children transfixed on pikes; and then would this fiend return to his palace and indulge in the vilest of orgies with his myrmidons. A few instances will suffice.

The town of Novgorod had aroused in Ivan's heart a suspicion of treachery. Therefore in 1570, in the depth of winter, the Tzar marched thither across some hundreds of miles of country, devastating the country on either side. Arriving at the town, the priests and deacons were removed from every monastery, and sent to gaol, with orders that they should be bastinadoed day and night. They were then ordered to pay certain sums of money for their freedom. A hideous fate awaited those who could not.

On 6th January every priest or monk remaining in gaol was flogged to death. Next, the secular clergy were cast into prison, including the Archbishop.

Now commenced an orgy of diabolical crime. The townsfolk, led before Ivan a hundred at a time, were partially roasted over a slow fire, then taken away, flogged, and drowned. Covered with blood and gasping, they were bound on sleighs, driven to a spot where the ice had been broken, and were cast into the river, the children being tied to their mothers and drowned with them.

These massacres lasted five weeks, and the "First Chronicle of Pskoff" reckons the number

of victims at 60,000. There is extant a document left by the monarch himself, in which, as was his custom, he enumerates the list of his principal victims. He was in the habit of sending these lists to the monasteries, requesting the monks' prayers for the souls of those destroyed.

As regards Novgorod, the list of prominent personages, preserved at the Monastery of St Cyril to this day, number 1500. The rest were of course of no account—peasants! Glance at the pages of this iniquitous document. After the names of the victims come such details as "with his wife," "with his wife and children," "with his daughters," and so on *ad infinitum*.

Moscow was deemed by the monarch to harbour accomplices of the treachery of Novgorod; then Moscow must suffer. June 25, 1570, saw three hundred wretched citizens standing in chains in the Red Square of that ancient town. Ivan appeared in state, but to his chagrin the Square was lacking spectators; the people had fled like frightened rats to the furthest corners of the town, where they panted in nameless fear. There were the instruments of torture—the stoves, the red-hot pincers, the barrels of tar, the iron claws, the

cords which were destined to rub human bodies asunder, the great coppers full of boiling water—all were there—but no people.

Then Ivan in a rage ordered the *Opritchniki* to prod the terror-stricken citizens from their hiding-places, and drive them to the scene of torture. This was done, and many thousands having been thus collected, the sport began. Viskovatyi, the Court Chancellor, was hung up by his feet and cut in pieces. Founikoff, the Treasurer, was sprinkled alternately with iced and boiling water "till his skin came off like an eel's" (Guagnino). The Treasurer's wife, being unable to disclose where her husband's wealth was hidden, was stripped, and in the presence of her daughter set astride on a cord stretched between two hooks and drawn to and fro till she died. An Englishman, De Horsey, states that he saw one man—Prince Boris Telepnieff—impaled and lingering on the stake for fifteen hours, while his own mother was violated by the soldiers before his eyes.

Oderboru (Joannis Basilidis vita. Vitebsk, 1585) tells of the destruction of the German suburb of Moscow in the following words:

“Young girls were violated and put to death before Ivan’s eyes, who aided in the massacre by thrusting the victims through with his hunting spear. Many women were flogged till the blood ran; their nails were torn out, and when they called on the name of Jesus the monster had their tongues drawn out by the roots. At last they were killed with lance-heads heated red-hot and thrust into their bodies. Philip, the noble Metropolitan of Moscow, alone braved the monarch’s ire. One Sunday (31st May 1568) Ivan entered the Cathedral of the Assumption, and asked for the great priest’s blessing; but Philip held his peace. Three times Ivan requested him to speak, but without avail. At last, when the *boiars* reproached him, the Pontiff broke the silence, and in a thundering voice rained denunciations on the monarch’s head, enumerating all his crimes and deeds of vile debauchery. ‘Hold thy peace!’ commanded the enraged sovereign. ‘If the *living* souls were to hold their peace,’ said the priest, ‘the very stones of the Church would speak and cry out against thee.’ ‘Hold thy peace!’ said the Czar; ‘that’s all I say to thee, and give me thy blessing.’ ‘My silence lays a sin upon my soul, and calls down thy death.’ ‘Hold thy peace! My subjects, my kinsmen rebelled against me — rebel no more along with them, or quit thy See.’ ‘I never asked to be put into this See. Why didst thou call me from my Hermitage?’ The inevitable

followed: the Metropolitan was submitted to a sham trial, at which the bishops of Novgorod, Souzdal, and Riazin appeared as witnesses, and the bold ecclesiastic was condemned and burned to death. Ivan's own relatives were not spared: his sister-in-law fell a victim, and, as a crowning feat of devilry, he killed his only son with his hunting spear."

And so affairs went on; and amidst it all we find Russia spreading her dominions, vanquishing the Tartars, and exciting interest amongst the Western nations. Our own Queen Elizabeth was anxious to know more of this strange country, and not infrequently sent messages to Ivan by the hand of special envoys. Anthony Jenkinson, an English merchant, has left us an account of Ivan's Court:

"The Emperour dined in a faire Hall, in the midst whereof was a pillar four square, very artificially made, about which were divers tables set, and at the vppermost part of the Hall sate his brother, his Vncles Sonne, the Metropolitaine, the young Emperour of Casan, and divers of his noble men all of one side. There were divers Ambassadors and other strangers as wel Christians as Heathens diversely apparalled, to the number of 600 men, which dined in the said hall, besides 2000 Tartars, men of war which were newly come

to render themselves to the Emperour, and were appointed to serve him, but they dined in other hals. I was set at a little table having no stranger with me directly before the Emperour's face. Being thus set and placed, the Emperour sent me divers bowles of wine and meade and many dishes of meat from his own hand, which were brought me by a Duke, and my table seemed all in golde and silver, and so likewise on other tables there were set boles of golde set with stone, worth by estimation 400 pounds sterling, one cup, beside the plate which served the tables. The Emperour and all the Hall throughout was served with Dukes, and when dinner was ended the Emperour called mee by name and gave mee drinke with his own hande, and so I departed to my lodging."

Thus Ivan the Terrible kept his Court and fed, while peasants cringed in holes and crannies, and starvation ran rife, for Russia at this period was oppressed by one long series of terrible famines. To these privations, as we have seen, Ivan added these terrible tortures. He kept a large standing army for the defence of the Empire, and taxed, by the most scandalous system of extortion, his wretched subjects to pay for its support. Ivan, in order to increase his revenue, established drinking-shops for the sale of *vodka*, where, and where alone, the peasants were com-

pelled to go to drink the fiery liquor and spend their earnings. Vladimir had already written: "Roussi vessële poetee: nee mojet bez tavo byt." ("Russia's joy is drink: she cannot exist without it.")

We read in an account of the time (1551) that at the church feasts men and women, boys and girls, spent the night in some out-of-the-way spot, dancing, singing, indulging in every form of sensual excess, and then the following words follow: "When dawn came, they ran shouting like mad folk down to the river, where they all bathed together, and when the bell rang for matins they went back to their houses, and there fell down like dead people of sheer exhaustion."

I would refer my readers to the Feast of Masslenitsa, described in the previous chapter, in order that they may draw their own comparisons and conclusions regarding the progress of the peasants since that time.

What constituted the peasantry at this period? There was the peasant proper, or very small farmer, who had the free disposal of his property so long as he paid the State and Communal taxes. Then came the agricultural labourers;

and lastly, the slaves — prisoners of war, etc., before enumerated.

The peasants proper differed from the agricultural labourers in having land in property or usufruct, and they belonged to that ancient system — the Commune. Some possessed land of their own, some were settled on the lands of proprietors or monasteries. The important point is that at this time the peasant was free—legally free. He was free to change his domicile, free in person, free to buy land, and free to migrate from spot to spot.

Free to migrate! There we have one of the original causes of Universal Serfdom, which was slowly but surely creeping to its accomplishment. Boris Godunoff, the successor of Ivan, is generally blamed for the deed, but it was no more the single act of Boris Godunoff than it was that of Queen Victoria. It was the consequence of political and economic causes, acting in this barbaric country with a force and certainty which proved irresistible, so that we find Russia almost imperceptibly being enthralled in the bonds of Serfdom—nay, slavery—at a time when the rest of Europe was just emerging from its feudal fetters.

Liberty, as the sixteenth century advanced, became but a meaningless name amongst the Russian people. Princes and *boyars*, merchants and people, and above all the peasants, lost the taste of it. Nobles and *mushiks* alike handed petitions to the King with the words "your slave." And in direct proportion as the nobles were the slaves and tools of the King, so were the peasants the slaves of the nobles and proprietors. Ivan had brought the proud aristocracy, the princes of the blood of Rurik, to the level which deprived them of all measure of self-respect; and in order to stop the breed of nobility, the heads of Russia's most eminent families were forbidden to marry.

War is an expensive luxury, and so taxation was carried to extreme, and the peasantry were not only tortured to provide the nobles with money, that they in their turn might supply the King, but in numberless cases their lands and goods were taken and given to the retired soldiery. Then, as the sixteenth century advanced, the peasantry, unable to bear the oppression, began to emigrate eastward—their last resource, and the last step previous to Serfdom!

We have seen that the land paid for all; then some one must work the land. He who had most land was taxed most; then he who had most land must have most labourers. Consequently those who had most money or power seized or attracted the peasants of the weaker owners. Then the Communes began to refuse leave to the peasants to emigrate or change their village, and the proprietors began to use force, and act under imaginary legal formalities.

The peasant who came to work for a proprietor rarely had implements to labour with, or capital to feed himself during the ensuing harvest. Then he borrowed, and the debt was converted into a bond, which held him in a vice. Peruse the laws relating to debt. All who have known debt will thank God they were not debtors living in Russia in those days.

The insolvent debtor was bound naked to a stake in the public square and beaten three times a day. This was repeated for thirty days; then, if no one appeared to pay for him, he could be sold as a slave; if no one bought him, he became the slave of the creditor. For theft, the criminal could be hung, beheaded, impaled,

drowned beneath the ice, or knouted to death. The woman who killed her husband was buried alive; the noble who killed a peasant was fined; but the peasant who killed a noble died to the accompaniment of every conceivable form of slow torture.

Thus Russia, with its dreary wastes, its vast extent, its scarcity of population, its forbidding climate, which forbade intercourse, bred weakness born of isolation, fostered credulity and blind obedience to the Church and superstitious ceremonial, became in reality before the days of Boris Godunoff, a Russia of slavery.

It was a recognised thing for a peasant, on meeting a noble or a landowner — *Pomiestchik*, as they were called—to turn his back, so that his face might not see that of such a superior being, and further to prostrate himself on the ground before him. Giles Fletcher tells us that there were numberless villages, distributed over one hundred miles of country outside Moscow, which were nude of inhabitants, they having fled from the Tzar and his nobles. If a noble committed a murder “in high life,” he could and did transfer the sentence to one of his peasantry.

Sometimes *two* were executed, and then the sentence was considered fully expiated: it was considered, as it were, that two of his most valuable pieces of property had been taken from him; but that human life had been sacrificed—No! It was further ordained that all members of the same peasant family were to be punished alike for the crime of one of them.

The transmission of the principles of despotism from the highest to the lowest was seen in the fact that a Russian peasant was as much an autocrat in his *izba* as was the Tzar on his throne. There was a law which allowed fathers to sell their children, so that children were actually born slaves.

The Russian women were as dogs in the eyes of all men; they were submitted to a system of slavery as barbarous as could be found obtaining in Eastern climes. Giles Fletcher says: "Harshly and cruelly used by the upper classes, the nation has grown harsh and cruel to its equals, and especially to its inferiors."

Woman was *par excellence* the inferior in the peasant household, as throughout Russia in all classes. The Byzantine ideas had been borrowed

largely. Solon's aphorism that "the wise man thanks the gods that he is a Greek and not a barbarian, a man and not a beast, a *male* and not a *female*," was marked, learned, and acted upon by the Russian people of those times. Russia carried out to the full the Eastern idea embodied in the statement that "a woman is a net to tempt men. With her clear face and high-set eyes she works spells. What is a woman?—a viper's nest." And the poor woman of the sixteenth century was treated as a snake, and spurned accordingly by high and low.

Thus it will not be difficult to realise that the change from a nominal freedom to an actual serfdom was easy of accomplishment.

How was the last link forged?

It has been said that the Tzar gave land to those who served him, but in reality the value of the land depended on the number of souls (as a working unit was called) who worked it. The gift was actually *counted* in souls. A noble might have so many souls given him; say, an estate with a hundred peasant families. Then suppose fifty of these families migrated to a neighbouring owner or to a distant region, then

the value of the gift was diminished by fifty per cent., and the noble was unable to fulfil by so much the less the obligations imposed on him. Then said the Tzar and the nobles and the *Pomiestchiki*: "This system, under which the peasant is a free man, and can move where he pleases, is an impossibility." So it came about that tradition and the law was disregarded on all sides. *Force* ruled. The inevitable followed. It only needed a law to make lawlessness legal.

When Boris Godunoff came to the Throne after Ivan's death, he completed the chain of serfdom by forging the last link in the shape of his famous Ukase forbidding emigration, by which the peasants were tied to the soil and to their village, and were degraded to a condition in which actually and legally they were slaves.

Following on the reigns of Ivan and Boris Godunoff came a stormy period of civil war, bred of the fact that usurpers were on the Throne, which yet other usurpers wished to occupy. This unhappy state of affairs proceeded until the advent of the first Romanoff, who, by

the unanimous wish of the people, was elected Tzar in 1613. He, and a series of similar nonentities after him, *reigned*—it is all that can be said of them—rulers who permitted the slight wave of progress produced by the influx of foreigners from the West during the latter part of Ivan's reign and that of Boris to be swamped in a whirlpool of reaction; and Russia steadily sank back till the advent in 1682 of the Great Peter.

This wonderful man entered at once upon a drastic—a too drastic—period of reform. His main idea was to produce order in his administrative departments throughout the Empire, or rather to create administrative departments after the style of Western states.

Unfortunately for Russia, his choice fell on the German system, and Russia found herself blessed temporarily, but cursed permanently, with a Bureaucracy.

I shall have a few words to say about this system in my concluding chapter, so shall not touch on it here, except to say that it has proved the curse of Russia, and, with the exception of bringing in its train, at its outset,

a temporary and very artificial cohesion in the confused administrative affairs of the Empire, has bred nothing but corruption and reaction in unhappy Russia.

Peter fought against gigantic obstacles, which only a genius and an autocrat could have surmounted. He employed his giant will and his terrible power unmercifully in the carrying out of what he deemed good for his people. On every page of his Ukases we read as penalties ordained for disobedience to his orders the knout and death. He created schools; abandoned the Slav alphabet—he had typographic machines brought from Holland; he founded hospitals and societies of all kinds. But none of these reforms reached the peasant. His great civil and military reforms needed money, and the peasant's toil supplied it. He replaced the tax on households by a tax on souls, and bonded the different classes of peasantry into one mass, so that they all at last belonged to the one definite category—slaves. The proprietors were made responsible for their peasants' poll-tax, and thus the law soon became that the unfortunate beings for whom they were

responsible were theirs in the sense of goods and chattels.

All serfs were made to enter a Commune, and the Commune was made answerable to the proprietor for the taxes demanded of them. Many now began to run away, but Peter had them severely flogged and sent to the mines; and the proprietors received the right to send them—for any offence whatsoever, and without trial—to the mines for ever. Peter died, and we will pass over the succeeding mediocre personalities who filled the Russian Throne till Catherine II. appeared on the scene.

This remarkable woman during her thirty-four years' reign created for herself, by reason of her unique personality, her deeds good and bad, and her great schemes of reform, a reputation which can never die as long as Russia remains a nation; but notwithstanding this fact, it remains undoubted that the oppression of the peasantry reached its height during her reign. This, however, as I hardly need point out, cannot be attributed entirely to Catherine. Economic causes, and the events happening during the many decades leading up to her reign, contributed to bring about this

climax ; and notwithstanding all Catherine's efforts to reform her country, not one stroke was accomplished on behalf of the Russian peasant, who steadily went back.

Serfs were now regarded as their masters' immovable property, and were given, bought, and sold, in tens, in hundreds, and in thousands, singly or in families. Peter in a Ukase announced :

" If one cannot abolish slavery completely, then slaves must be sold in families without separating the husbands and wives, the parents and children, and not as beasts of the field, a thing which is done nowhere else in the wide world."

But in the reign of Catherine this was disregarded. There was no law for the peasant ; he became an animal, and was treated as such.

Let us glance at a few of the trials under which the peasant laboured in this reign, and see to what incredible tortures he had to submit.

Firstly, whereas in the days of Boris they worked three days for the proprietor and three for themselves, they now worked all the week for their master until his labour was finished, when, as often as not, it was too late for their own work. Proprietors could sell the father or

mother of a family, but were permitted by law to retain the children or sell them at prices, according to age, ranging from five to twenty roubles.

Many thousands of serfs, when too old to work, were packed off to Siberia for some imaginary offence, and of course died on the way. In 1767 the place of exile was changed from Nertchinsk to Tobolsk by the Government, and proprietors were specially notified that the Government wished to populate that province. The result was a stream of serfs from all the inhuman proprietors in the kingdom—for not only were the majority of these too old to work, but for each one sent the Government gave so much, and relieved the proprietor of the obligation to send one recruit to the Army. The proprietors made their own laws, *vide* a few culled from the Law-book of Count Rumiantseff:

“*Theft.*—To go as recruit to the Army, and be kept in chains, on bread and water, for a period.”

“*For insulting a neighbouring proprietor.*—To be whipped cruelly (*Zhestoko*).”

“*For insulting the bailiff.*—Fine of fifty Kopeks—an immense sum to the poor peasant.”

Petitions to proprietors were strongly objected to. The wife of General Tolstoy ordered all petitioners to be sent to another estate, and to have their hair and beards shaved, and "a spiked collar placed round their neck" for a stated period, "so that they cannot sleep." Princess Dashkoff had her peasants dashed against the stove, so that their skulls were broken, and chained other unfortunates to posts for lengthy periods. In other Law-books we read such items:

"(1.) *For asking for key when the gospodeen (master) slept.*—One rouble fine.

"(2.) Thekla Jaklovitch—(*for entering the room when the gospodeen slept*) — henceforth lose her name, and be styled poltroon and liar, and if anybody calls her by name that person is to be beaten with rods (5000 strokes) unmercifully.

"(3.) If a serf omits to fast at the proper time and for the period ordained by the Church, he or she must fast for a week and receive 5000 strokes unsparingly. If after this he lies down for a week he will receive 100 lashes with the whip or 17,000 with the birch. If he then lies down for another week, he will receive yet another 50 with the lash, or 10,000 with the birch; and if he then lies down, then, for every day he does so, he will receive neither bread nor provisions, and money will be extracted from his salary."

Needless to say, death intervened as a general rule before the execution of these sentences *in toto*.

Were there any punishments for these inhuman proprietors?

Yes, of a sort. In the Public Law-Book (Army Regulations, cap. xix.) we read:

“The Court must examine carefully with what weapons the deceased was killed—why he died so easily, and must ascertain how it was possible for him to die so easily (*sic*). If it happens that some officer wishes to beat his subordinates for some reason, but does so with so much zeal that the punished one dies, then he is deprived of his rank, with money fine or confinement.”

Petitions to Catherine were frequent from the distressed peasantry, but she seems to have got tired of these wails of despair, and to have hardened her heart, and taken the side of her nobility and the proprietors. At any rate, she issued a stern Ukase to the effect that *serfs were not to be permitted to complain of their masters*. This did not stop the flood of petitioners, who marched from all directions to Petersburg to present their complaints to her. I choose one alone from the mass of material at hand.

In 1767 the peasantry of Count Alexis Lapuchin petitioned the Empress that, rather than leave them to the mercy of their master, "will your Majesty order us to be killed or exiled for ever?"

Catherine in reply ordered "half of them to be whipped publicly with rods in the market-place and other squares in Moscow, and the other half to be whipped in the villages in presence of the peasants; and then send them to hard labour in the Siberian mines."

Why wonder at the rebellion of Pugatcheff, that peasant leader, who ranged thousands of *muzhiks* under his rebel standard to fight against the Government, when Russia's Queen spoke thus?

It seems evident that towards the end of her reign Catherine hardened her heart, like Pharaoh of old. Of the author of *A Journey from Petersburg to Moscow*, a vivid sketch of the lamentable condition of the peasantry between those towns, she wrote: "There he goes weeping about the mournful destiny of the peasant, although it is beyond argument that a better destiny than our peasants have, under a good

proprietor (*sic*), is not to be found in the wide world."

One can only say that Catherine said this either in a cruel spirit of cynicism or that she had unnatural ideas of the rights of man, and especially of that man as represented by the Russian peasant. Needless to say, Catherine's reign terminated leaving the peasant in a worse condition than he had ever been in since the inauguration of Serfdom.

Paul, a man of eccentricities, fads, and fancies, rather than a ruler, bridged the space between Catherine and the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, in his reign came the first sign of a reaction in favour of the peasant.

By an Imperial Ukase Paul ordained that peasants should not work more than three days a week for their masters, and further endeavoured to curtail the power of the latter.

But in the beginning of 1800 we find Russia in as bad a state and position as ever. An author of this period writes :

"Russia, degraded by ages of slavery, resembles those degenerate animals, to whom the domestic state has become a second nature. It must be

gradually and by long and difficult paths that he returns to liberty; he is yet a stranger to the import of the word. To him to be free signifies to be able to quit the glebe to which he is chained, and lead a vagabond life. Work he detests, because he has never worked for himself. He has not even an idea of property—his fields, his goods, his wife, himself, his children, belong to a master who can dispose of them, and who does dispose of them, at pleasure. He is interested in nothing, because he possesses nothing; his attachment to his village is that of an ox to the crib to which he is accustomed. He is without country, without laws, without religion. Christianity, as taught and practised amongst the Russians, no more deserves the name of religion than the sound which the carman uses to direct his horses deserves the name of language. Russia is now the common asylum of the ignorance, the barbarism, the superstitions, and the prejudices that persecuted Europe. The man who carries into these climes something of knowledge and sentiment finds it extinguished. The despot makes him a grant of a few hundred souls—the price of his *own*. He thinks it very just, and very fortunate that there should be slaves and that he is one himself.”

Further, we read: “The peasant is absolutely without morals,” and again he says:

“What has disgusted me is to see men with grey

hair and patriarchal beards lying on their faces with their trousers down, and flogged like children. Still more horrible! there are masters who sometimes force the son to inflict this punishment on the father. These and many other horrid acts are committed, especially in the country, where the lords in their castles exercise the same authority over men as over animals."

Of the Russian soldier he says :

"Once dragged from his hut and all that are dear to him, he must grow old under the severest discipline, if he do not fall by the enemy's sword. If he be married, scarcely will he have quitted his wife before his master may have given her to another. The soldier never obtains furlough, so that if he has children he will never see them again. Whether he guide the life-supporting plough or handle the destructive musket, the Russian is fettered, and trembles under the lash of a master. All the qualities of his heart are withered, and his tenderest feelings outraged."

And this condition of affairs held sway throughout the reign of the charitable but weak-minded Alexander I. The latter made efforts for the peasant's good, but these efforts were frustrated by the actions of the men who were his counsellors, particularly such men as Count Araktcheyeff, so

that in 1823 we find Nicholas, the incarnation of Autocracy and Reaction, ascending the Throne without any material improvement in the *muzhik's* condition having been achieved. And now things went back with a run. That iniquitous Police system, so odiously peculiar to Russia, was inaugurated; a censorship was instituted for the suppression of all foreign literature and papers. All writings were subjected to a relentless scrutiny, and any book, journal, or paper containing even the ghost of an opinion which might by any conceivable process of twisting be termed dangerous, or contrary to the principles of autocracy, was refused entry into Russia.

Needless to say, education, and the freedom of the Press and literature generally, suffered. The number of University students was decreased, and military schools multiplied. In fact, Nicholas took upon himself to champion Autocracy against Democracy and Freedom, and did it well.

As regards the peasantry, Nicholas instituted but one reform of a progressive nature, viz. that in which was ordained that the procedure of the Village Assemblies should be carried on by ballot; but amongst the *muzhiks* themselves the

idea never found favour. In reality, their position became steadily worse. Ukases, which had been promulgated by his predecessors, making conditions of contract between nobles and proprietors and their serfs compulsory, so that there should be generated a system of mutual obligation, were made null and void.

Nicholas I., with his colossal stature, his imposing exterior, his pride, his iron will, his power of work, his taste for the minute details of Governmental administration, his passion for all things military — always girt in uniform, always a martinet, always a ruler — was the type *par excellence* of an Autocrat, and could not bear the idea of yielding one iota to the so-called rights of the people. Thus it can be understood that Serfdom, which had become part and parcel of the system of Autocracy — its actual basis — its bedrock — remained, notwithstanding the beneficent and noble ideas which Nicholas possessed, as firmly planted as, and even firmer than, it had been in the days of Catherine II.

The concluding events of the reign of Nicholas, viz. the disasters in the East — where not only had Turkey flouted the might of Russia, but the

armies of England and France had humiliated the Russian Eagle at Alma and Sebastopol — brought a terrible awakening throughout the Empire. All had expected great things for Russia, from the realisation of the vast military schemes of Nicholas. More, people cherished hopes of the conquest of Constantinople, the overthrow of Eastern domination by the might of Russia's arms, the deliverance of the Holy City, and, indeed, many other fantasies of the brain; but each and all of these were destined to be shattered into a thousand fragments, with the result that the people awoke suddenly to the real truth of the situation, and notwithstanding the laws calculated to paralyse all effort, and notwithstanding the rigorous police system obtaining, made their voices heard in one gigantic burst of indignation from end to end of Russia. Rivers of revolutionary pamphlets issued from the Press, and were distributed throughout the country, and the eye of the autocratic Nicholas was compelled to read such documents as the following in the closing years of his reign. I quote from an anonymous document distributed broadcast in 1855:

“Awake, O Russia! Devoured by enemies from without, ruined by slavery, shamefully oppressed by the stupidity of the *Tchinorniks* (Bureaucratic officials) and spies, awake from thy long sleep of ignorance and apathy! We have been for too long held in bondage by the successors of the Tartar Khans (*sic*). Arise; present thyself before the throne of the despot, and demand of him a reckoning for the national humiliation. Tell him boldly that his throne is not the altar of God, and that God has not condemned us to be eternally slaves. Russia, O Tzar, confided the supreme power in you, and you were as a God on earth! What then have you done? Blinded by passion and ignorance, you have sought power alone—you have forgotten Russia. You have passed your life reviewing troops, planning fresh uniforms, and signing the legislative projects of ignorant charlatans. You have created that despicable body of men—the censors of the Press—in order that you might sleep in peace; in order that you might not hear the murmur of your people; in order that you might not hear the voice of Truth. Truth you have buried; you have rolled a great stone against the door of her sepulchre; you have placed a strong guard over her tomb, and in your inmost heart have you said, ‘For her there is no resurrection.’ Advance, Tzar, to the tribunal of God and History. You have without mercy trodden Truth under foot; you have refused liberty, all men being the slaves of your passion. By your pride and obstinacy

you have humiliated Russia; you have armed the world against her. Humiliate yourself before your brethren! Bend thy proud self in repentance! Implore pardon, demand advice, throw thyself into the arms of the people. There is no other safety for thee!"

Did Nicholas follow this advice?

No! His answer was, "My successor can do what he pleases; I *cannot* change." And he did not. Like a rock, firmly fixed and resisting the terrible ocean waves, he stood unaffected, unvanquished, by the protestations, the abuse, the unanimous wishes of his people, and, dying on the 9th of February 1855, caused with his last breath these words to be despatched to the furthest limits of Russia over whom he had reigned an Autocrat: "The Emperor is dead!"

Alexander II. entered on the duties of kingship, and with his advent on the Russian stage rose the hopes of the people; and this time not in vain. He immediately took steps in the direction of the Emancipation of the Serfs, and, as stated in the previous chapter, the blow fell in March 1856, when in his speech to the Moscow *noblesse*, the Emperor declared his intention of "abolishing Serfdom from above

rather than awaiting the time when it will begin to abolish itself from below."

On 19th February 1861 the Emperor signed the Decree by which over 40,000,000 serfs were liberated. It was decreed:

"That (1.) The serfs should at once receive the civil rights of the free rural classes, and that the authority of the proprietor should be replaced by Communal Self-Government.

"(2.) That the rural Communes should, as far as possible, retain the land they actually held, and should in return pay to the proprietors certain yearly dues in money or labour.

"(3.) That the Government should, by means of credit, assist the Communes to redeem these dues, or, in other words, *purchase* the land ceded in usufruct."

Put in business language: the dues were capitalised at six per cent., and the Government paid to the proprietors at once four-fifths of the whole sum. The peasants were to pay to the proprietors the remaining one-fifth either at once or in instalments, and to the Government six per cent. for forty-nine years on the sum advanced.

The result of this reform was curious. The

peasantry were universally disappointed. For they argued that, according to tradition, the Communal land already belonged to them, and the proprietor merely had authority over them, that authority having been given by the Tzar. Now therefore that the proprietors had, so to speak, been removed, they said that the land should belong to the Communes — *without any further payment*. This, then, became a burning village problem, and many believed that the real Ukase had been suppressed by the Bureaucracy. It was rumoured that the Tzar was sitting on a golden throne in the Crimea distributing land, and many thousands flocked towards that visionary Utopia until stopped by the military. To this very day the idea is rife amongst the *muzhiks* that deception was practised; and there are those living who have recounted to me with frenzied eloquence how “the good Tzar’s wishes were not carried out,” and how their fathers at that period strove in vain to make it known to the Little Father how he was being deceived.

What was the effect of the Emancipation on proprietor and peasant respectively? Narrowed down to plain facts, the results were these: In

the Northern Zone of Russia, where the soil is poor and the most valuable asset to the proprietor was the serf, the deprivation of his free labour spelt ruin. As a consequence, to-day we see that the proprietors have given up farming, and the land is let to the peasantry.

In the northern part of the Southern Zone the system of farming on Western methods is gradually creeping in, and as a whole the proprietors are better off than before the Emancipation, and the soil is good. In the southern section of the Southern Zone the condition of the proprietors is a good deal worse, for at the Emancipation there were fewer peasants, and many less than were required. Hence, when the proprietors lost their serfs, and part of their land too, the compensation was not in any way proportioned to the loss.

Now as to the peasant, what was expected? That the whole status of the class, morally, agriculturally, socially would be changed; that he would work for himself as he had never worked for others; that he would prosper, buy land, become a small landed proprietor, and that Russia's wastes would be reclaimed—in a word

that he would become a changed man, and Russia in consequence a changed country.

Has this happened? No. Why? Because, first and foremost, the peasant was utterly devoid of education. When a serf he had no responsibilities; when bad agricultural years came, they did not affect *him*. When his *izba* was burned, when his tools or his horses were stolen, it did not affect *him*. They always had their master to fall back upon, and their cattle fed on his land.

With the Emancipation came the stoppage of all this, and every untoward condition directly affected the peasant himself, and he was not mentally advanced enough either to become a small landowner or to grasp the new situation. He could not manage his affairs, and he could not understand why he should pay taxes. He got into a poverty-stricken condition, and found, as he finds to-day, that an advance of food or money in bad times—advances which before were gifts—are now but bonds which, in the event of his inability to repay, hold him to the proprietors year after year. He then becomes deeper and deeper in the proprietor's debt, and the debt of others to whom he goes for temporary assistance.

A further fact is that the redemption dues were in many parts in excess of the actual rent, and these the peasants for many reasons found themselves absolutely powerless to pay.

In conclusion to this historical chapter, I wish to say a few words regarding that ancient institution—the Village Commune.

First, in order that the minds of my readers may not be filled with false ideas, let me say that to-day officially—that is, by Imperial Ukase—the Commune has ceased to exist as an institution ordained by the autocratic will. I give the substance of that Ukase, and at the same time shall follow it up with a brief account of the Commune as it has existed for centuries and as *actually* — notwithstanding the Imperial Ukase and many previous Imperial Ukases tending in the same direction—it exists to-day over the greater part of Russia, and is pretty certain to exist for a good long while to come, till the Government decide to give education to the peasants.

The Ukase reads thus (18th October 1906):

“All peasants are equal before the law.”

(This is significant as to what was their state previously.)

“The peasants are freed from the bondage entailed by the Communal System and all its attendant evils. The Village Commune will no more be taxed as a whole for the Government and *Zemstvo* taxes. Peasants may now reside where they will, and without Communal consent, and join another Commune.

“The peasants are at liberty to retain the Communal System as a system.”

Thus the Imperial Decree, and it is ordained to take place in January of the current year ; but so far one has been unable to detect any movement amongst the Bureaucratic officials in the country, or amongst the peasants themselves, towards carrying out the terms of that Ukase ; and indeed it is possible that it will meet the same fate as so many other Ukases. The Tzar issues them ; the Government distributes copies to the Bureaucratic *régime*, and in the pigeon-holes of the Bureaucratic *régime* they remain. The peasant hears nothing of them, but reports magnificently complete, and beautifully stamped with many a rouble stamp, are presented for the

Government consumption, which Government, having duly swallowed them, presents them to the Tzar for his gracious signature, and another Ukase has seen its execution.

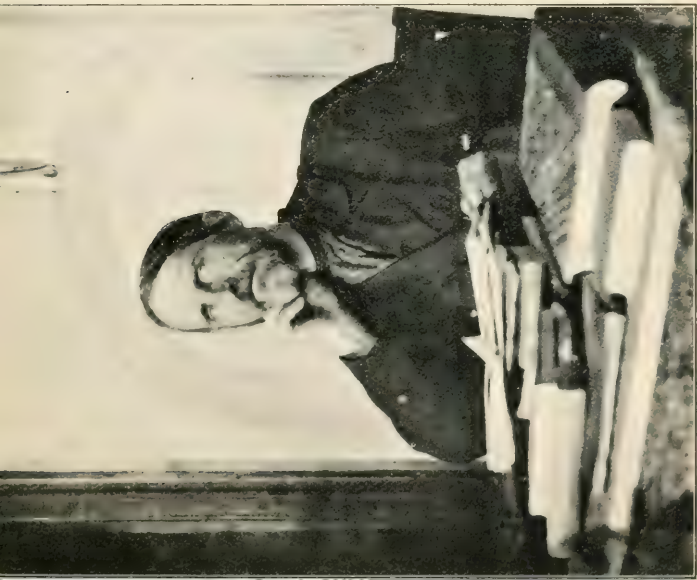
Hence my readers will not be surprised if I proceed to give a few interesting details of that Russian village system, which a Russian Bureaucrat would assuredly inform one from this time forth does not exist, but which in fact does exist, and will take a very long time dying.

Besides this, it is absolutely necessary for the understanding of the Russian peasant problem to know a few elementary facts regarding the Communal system, and these facts I now proceed to give.

The Commune means a commonality of interest amongst the inhabitants. The Russian peasant family has a head ; the heads of families form the Commune ; and from the Commune is elected every year or three years a *Starosta* or chief. Several Communes, represented by the *Starosta* of each, go to form the District Volost. Each peasant has his *izba* on the village land, and this is his permanently. The arable land, part of which he must work, is not his actually ; it belongs

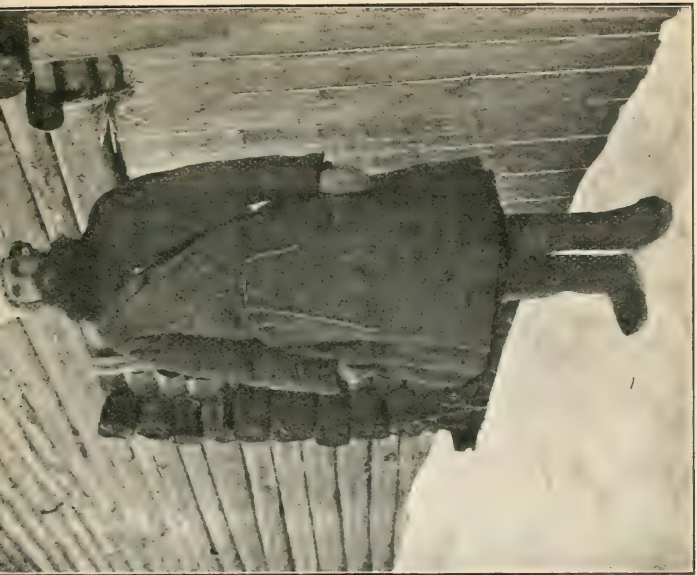
to the Commune. The arable land is divided into three parts to suit the principle of triennial rotation of crops, so that that which is used for winter grain this year is used for summer grain the next, and the third year lies fallow. Each family possesses in each of the two fields under cultivation so many strips, according to the richness of the soil and the working capacity of the family. Thus the fields are divided up into innumerable long narrow strips parallel with one another, and these difficult proportional distributions are done by the peasants themselves with measuring-sticks.

Each family must work according to the rules of the Commune. Ploughing, reaping, sowing, harrowing—work of any sort—must be done at the time ordained by the Commune, neither before nor after. Every family is responsible for every member of that family. If there is a drunkard and ne'er-do-weel in the family, the onus of the non-fulfilment of his duties falls on the family. Similarly, if a family is lazily inclined, that family has a very bad time of it, for if it does not do its share of the Communal work, till its share of the Communal land, and pay its share of the



Bleenkoff.

A Peasant whose studies have extended beyond the literature of his own country. The works of Charles Dickens are familiar to him.



Type of intelligent Peasant.

Communal taxes, which the Commune must pay to the Government, then the Commune, *i.e.* the village as a whole, is held responsible by Government.

A peasant may not leave his village for other regions without obtaining leave from the Commune, and, having gone, he is required to pay his taxes when away, and may be recalled at the will of the Commune. At varying intervals there are Communal distributions of land, at which periods all the land is freshly parcelled out according to the increased or decreased capabilities of the families, and in order to provide land for those new families that have arisen in the interval. The intervals of distribution vary immensely, from yearly distributions to even twenty yearly distributions.

Again, the Government Census list enumerates Communal "Souls," and from the time of one census to that of the next, the village Commune must pay taxes for that number of "souls" found to be existent at the last census. So that frequently it will be found, especially in these times, when in certain parts of Russia the inhabitants are dying like flies from famine, that a village

is paying taxes for some thirty, forty, fifty souls that were long since dead. Gogol's wonderful novel, *Dead Souls*, is founded on this anomaly.

This is the system that has existed in Russia up to 1907, and is likely, as I have said, to go on existing till the peasant becomes a thinking and intelligent being, endowed with a modicum of education.

Was it, and is it, suited to Russia's needs? There are those who claim that it is the only system that will suffice to prevent the formation of a dangerous proletariat—hence the efforts of the Bureaucrats and Reactionaries to retain the system, and keep rumours of Imperial Ukases and all the “gracious reforms according to the Imperial will of us Nicholas ” from the peasants' ears.

Their argument is, that the Commune is essentially competent to retain the peasantry on the land; that by the Commune more than a half of the cultivable land in Russia is reserved for them; and that, when born, the peasant acquires a right to the land.

This is all very well if Russia is to remain exclusively agricultural, for emigration could take the place of redistribution. However, the

vital fact remains—there is no land tenure such as we understand it in England; and although now by Ukase the Tzar has decreed that the Commune does not officially exist, yet a clause, as seen above, states that every village *may* do as it thinks fit. Well, that means that the decision as to the existence or not of the antiquated system will rest with the majority of the peasants of the villages *when* they come to discuss it at all; and seeing that the majority are ignorant, it is pretty certain that the system will remain in force, and that the more intelligent amongst the Russian peasants will continue to find themselves tied hand and foot by it.

Is Russia to remain exclusively agricultural? Decidedly no. Russia has the ambition to become a great commercial country.

What, then, is one of the great drawbacks?

The Village Commune is the answer, for there now exists—owing to that very system, with its bad method of distribution of land, its direct action against Western methods of agriculture, etc. — a condition of affairs which in itself produces a large proletariat—a large body of

men who, not having sufficient work in the villages, spend part of the year in the towns, or "trek" for work to distant parts. Then they can neither become good agriculturists nor good artisans.

People may say that this forbids the formation of a town proletariat, for the men have the village to go back to. Yes; but the village population continues to grow, and the time has arrived when, the more workers there are, the worse it is for the village strangled by the Communal system.

What makes matters doubly worse is the unequalled laziness of the peasant himself. I have seen the peasantry over the greater part of Europe, and have no hesitation in saying that the equal in sloth of the Russian peasant does not exist amongst that class. He is behind the times in mind and activity, and the greater part of the vast class have no wish to improve their own condition.

Amongst the reasons for this lack of energy, this apathy towards progress and cultivation, must be put first his enforced serfage of the past, which has left him to-day utterly unable

to understand what is meant by education, progress, or culture.

Be this as it may, the fact remains that the present Government, which seems anxious to do something for our friend, has its work made infinitely more difficult owing to the stupidity of the class for which it is called upon to legislate. To assert that the peasantry, as a class, are fit to have suffrage is sheer nonsense, and is equivalent to saying that children should have the right to vote and take part in electoral representation.

In conclusion of this chapter, let me give a few simple statistics relating to the peasant problem.

In 1860, the year previous to the Emancipation, distributed over fifty governments, were as follows :

	Men.	Possessing Dessiatives. ¹	Dessiatives = per Man.
State Peasants .	10,000,000	74,000,000	7
Appanage Peasants	8,700,000	4,300,000	5
Landlords' Peasants	11,907,000	35,700,000	3

Instead of giving the peasants an increase on three dessiatives, many proprietors gave them even less, so that the peasant found himself with more time to work for himself but less land.

¹ A dessiative = $2\frac{1}{2}$ acres.

Left to the State at the Emancipation were—151,000,000 dessiatives of cultivatable land; left to the Appanages at the Emancipation were 7,500,000 dessiatives of cultivatable land; and left to the proprietors at the Emancipation were 100,000,000 dessiatives of cultivatable land.

From the first it was seen that the system by which the peasants were to pay the State—at 6 per cent. interest over forty-nine years—the money it had advanced to the proprietors, would not work. The peasantry every year found difficulty in paying, and the unwise course was taken of forcing the payment from them by means of an increased Police system, and it was not until 1905 that the Tzar abolished the obligation arranged in 1861.

In 1881 thousands of peasants being unable to pay, Government reduced land taxation, and measures were taken to facilitate emigration, and to aid the peasantry to buy land; and for this purpose the Peasants' Bank was formed in 1883. The need of more land was so great that even before 1880 the peasantry had purchased about 1,889,800 acres without aid, and up to the beginning of 1900 the Land Bank had advanced

£20,273,842, whilst land actually bought by the peasants amounted to 11,656,620 acres.

Hardly had the Government agreed to the Emigration Scheme, when, through M. de Plehve, it was cancelled. Nevertheless, in 1822, when emigration was stopped, 9000 departed for Siberia; from 1890-1900, 185,000; and between 1901 and 1903, 86,000 left the soil of European Russia. The need of land was becoming greater and greater, and the peasant population was increasing incredibly.

Every man soul had, on an average, in 1861, 4·8 dessiatives; in 1880, 3·5 dessiatives; and in 1900, 2·5 dessiatives.

In 1901 each peasant had about four-fifths of the amount of land he was capable of cultivating. The crops yielded 16 per cent. less than the growth necessary for peasant needs, and 41 per cent. less than that for the needs of the cattle. Further, it is a melancholy fact that though the landlords had double the amount of land capable of cultivation by the peasants, half of it remained fallow.

To-day, only 8·9 of the peasantry can spare any of their agricultural produce for sale, and

70·7 per cent. cannot raise sufficient produce for subsistence.

But the statement that if all the proprietors' land were given to the peasantry it even then would not suffice, is only true because it is said in connection with the Russian peasant. I would go further, and say, if double the amount of land owned by the proprietors was given to the peasants, the latter would, after a given period of years, find themselves in the same state of beggary as to-day, and we should see them still clamouring for land, simply because they do not know how to cultivate, and are so ignorant and uneducated that they do not *wish* to learn to farm in any other way than that which has been handed down to them by their forefathers. It is not the lack of land so much as this ignorance, combined with his natural laziness and addiction to drink, which has brought him to the pass he is in to-day.

The question of who is to blame for this ignorance I shall discuss in the next chapter. Meanwhile, the rent of land is increasing. During the last thirty years rents have quadrupled and quintupled in Central and South Russia, and in East and West have doubled and trebled.

In 1885 the arrears in taxes were 50,000,000 roubles; in 1896 they were 142,500,000 roubles. The live stock is falling off. There is a diminution of pasture land by increased cultivation of grain; consequently peasants have insufficient horses for farming operations, and insufficient manure, although it must be said that in many parts of Russia even now the manure is burnt for fuel by the ignorant peasants. Of course, in the present lamentable, famine-stricken condition of the country, anything—manure included—that can be got hold of is burned, to bring warmth to their meagrely-covered bones; and the needs of the land for the coming year are entirely forgotten in the struggle to relieve the bodily pangs of the moment.

Let us pass from history and statistics to an investigation of the means that have been taken by the Government in the past, and the means that are being taken to-day, on behalf of the peasants, and I will endeavour to show my readers that the main causes of the woeful condition of the Russian peasants at this hour are the Church and Bureaucracy.

CHAPTER III

RUSSIA'S POISON—BUREAUCRACY AND CHURCH

"BUREAUCRACY" is the most hated and despised word in the Russian language, except by the Russian Bureaucratic official or *Tchinovnik* himself, who would print the word in gold, and hang it up, surrounded by precious stones, in all the churches of the Empire.

Cause and effect! We have seen that the Mongol invasion left its mark on Russia, and that centuries of Serfdom degraded her beyond the power of description, till 1861 saw the abolition of the latter execrable system. Yet to-day Russia groans under oppression, and is not one whit in a better condition than forty-six years ago; nay, she is, taking all things into consideration, in a far worse position than she was then. Here we have the effect!

What is the cause, what is the canker, that is gnawing at Russia's heart, and sucking her very life-blood at this hour?

The answer can be given in one word —
“Bureaucracy.”

Happy the child of past centuries, who was not born a peasant in a Russian village, for he was born into a bondage for which it would be hard to find a parallel. To-day, with the exception that the conditions of bondage as regards the body proper and enforced labour are legally impossible, and actually much less marked, the statement holds good. The status to which the Russian peasant is born the unfortunate heir has changed but little since the days of Ivan the Terrible. Indeed, in naming that period as a parallel, one criticises mildly the conditions obtaining to-day amongst the peasant masses.

In those days he was at least born a free man; he could, at any rate, do as he pleased; and if opportunities for learning came within his reach he was permitted to make use of them. To-day he is also, according to law and countless Ukases emanating from the Imperial Chancellory and signed by the autocratic hand, born a free man. But where else in any country of the world that arrogates to itself the right

to be considered civilised is it found that the lives of the children begin under such conditions as obtained to-day in the Russian *izba*? The phrase so commonly used amongst Western people, "first saw the light," is not applicable to the birth of the *muzhik*, for light there *is* not in the foul, pestilential, vapour-laden den into which the unfortunate little creature is launched; and indeed, if he happens to be born in the depth of the pitiless winter, it is long before he sees God's light, and breathes anything approaching to pure air. And into what is he born? Nothing less than a condition infinitely worse, from a moral point of view, than the condition of recognised Serfdom which was formerly his lot.

It is no use disguising the fact—it is no use arguing that it is the peasant's fault that he is very little higher in the scale than our pre-historic ancestors; it is no use for these Russians, responsible for their country's welfare and their moral progress and enlightenment, to sit still with an air of injured innocence and smug hypocrisy, and say, "What can we do with such *canaille*?"

The task is theirs to improve this condition

of affairs, to search indefatigably for the root of the evil — which, alas! is not far to seek, for it lies on the surface plain to all — and to eradicate it ruthlessly, whatever the cost. Why are there “such *canaille*” existent to-day, in the year of our Lord 1907, forty-six years after the Emancipation? Why has the peasant degenerated instead of progressed since that much vaunted period? Why can no honest man deny the fact that the peasant is treated as a dog, is more a serf than ever he was, and is denied all opportunities of becoming an enlightened being?

Will the official Russian for ever supply a deceived Europe with the glib assertion that the Tartar invasion and Serfdom are to blame, and will Europe and the civilised world for ever swallow the delicately gilded pill? Will it never search for itself, without the aid of Russian officialism, for the true cause of Russia's deplorable condition? And when it does, what will it unanimously decide is the cause of this slow-gnawing canker which eats at the heart of Russia, and retains her entangled in the mire of degeneracy and reaction? Will England and other nations continue to supply huge loans on

the supposition that they are bolstering up the Russian State, and relieving the real Russian people? Will the answer to these questions never be satisfactorily supplied to a deceived world? Will hoodwinked foreigners of all other nationalities never understand that one thing alone is to-day the cause of Russia's trouble? that one answer alone, one *word*, is needed to all these questions?—and that word is, "Bureaucracy."

Loans, memorials, sympathy in the past, have done nothing but bolster up Bureaucracy to the detriment of the Russian Nation, to the detriment of the Russian People, to the degradation of Russia as a whole.

Till Russia has been swept of the last vestiges of Bureaucracy, it will remain stagnant as a State, its policy a party one born of the self-seeking motives of its corrupt officialism, incapable of being trusted, respected, or carrying real weight amongst the Powers of the world, incapable of being accepted as the true expression of the feeling of the true, great Russian people. All cankers gnawing at the vitals of unfortunate Russia are as nought in comparison with it; indeed, most cankers are its offspring.

The crimes of politicals of all classes, the bombs of revolutionaries of all creeds, all acts anti-Governmental or against Tzardom—the low *morale* to be found permeating all grades of the Russian Administration, can be proved without any difficulty to be more or less the direct outcome of that most rotten of all rotten systems holding sway on the surface of the earth to-day—the Bureaucratic System. Bureaucracy is reaction; breeds vice and corruption, strangles honesty, progress, reform, and every effort to engender a pure, straightforward, patriotic national life; its policy centralisation; its gods formality, documents, pens and ink; its deeds, statistics; its creed ignorance.

Then before proceeding to give the actual effects of this system throughout Russia, and more especially in reference to the Russian peasant, let us glance at its construction, and endeavour to discover how such an iniquitous organisation could have been saddled on the back of a great white race—and a European race—numbering over 140,000,000 of people. Irony indeed that Peter the Great, that creator of all reforms for the good of his country, that

eminently honest and straightforward well-wisher for the progress of Russia and her people, should be destined to be labelled as the introducer of a system which was to prove the chief obstruction to her advancement in the future, and the main cause of all those overwhelming afflictions which beset her to-day. Peter, finding the Empire disjointed and lacking combination of the classes, looked about for material to form such an organisation which should unite Russia, and supply her with a definite system, the force and discipline of which should be felt from the highest downwards.

Unfortunately for Russia, Germany supplied Peter with the required idea, and Peter, taking his stand, generally speaking, on the conditions holding in that country, set to work to level all distinctions, and class his people in grades, according to official standing. The nobility went with a crash to the ground (I refer to the real hereditary nobility), never to rise again to real importance to this very hour.

Nobles and proprietors migrated from their estates, and flocked to Petersburg and Moscow, realising that Governmental service from that time meant all, and hereditary nobility nothing.

All girt up their loins and ran in feverish haste to bask in the light of Tchin. All had titles high sounding in proportion to the grades, of which there were fourteen (each of the fourteen being divided up into a multitude of smaller grades), so that even the boy who swept the Governmental office might have titular rank, and a uniform which should enable him to look down upon those ununiformed individuals — Tchinless beings—the people.

To show what a sweeping change was effected, and how real nobility became a thing of the past, it is only necessary to say that from the time of Peter the Great to the reign of Alexander I., every officer of the Army of a certain rank, and every *employee* of equivalent rank in the Governmental service, belonged by right to the hereditary nobility. Tchin reigned; none escaped it. To have influence, power, and be respected, Tchin was the one and only necessity; to be without Tchin, it were as well one had never been born. A humble civil functionary, of medium ambition and decidedly less capability, found himself suddenly saddled with Tchin and a uniform, which bestowed on

him the high-sounding title of "Councillor," and besides made him the equal of some military officer, and competent to command a battalion, while a portly dignitary of the Church would wake up to find himself a General of Brigade or its equivalent.

All of any standing became either councillors or acting councillors, acting privy councillors, councillors of State, acting councillors of State, acting privy councillors of State, assessors, private assessors, etc., etc., *ad infinitum*. Russia became a well, in which all real title to nobility, all real merit, was sunk, and from which was dragged up myriads of meaningless and absurd designations which, far from ennobling them or embuing them with honest ambition, levelled them to the depths of mediocrity, and impregnated them with but one insatiate desire to attain yet higher in the dazzling ranks of Tchín.

All people of real worth, if they were able, forsook the Governmental Service, and did their best to dissociate themselves from the hungry masses striving to be fed with a rank so easy of attainment; and the same may be said to-day. Real nobility, the nobility born of character and

worth, with but rare exceptions, is not to be found within the Bureaucratic ranks.

Gogol, the Voltaire of Russian authors, has only too faithfully represented the class of people who fill the Administrative offices to-day from top to bottom of this vast Empire; but not even his keen satire has adequately expressed the incredible rottenness of the system, and the inconceivable incompetence and corruption of the great majority of Administrative officials. The possession of intellect, broad education, and culture actually bars one from the ranks of the Governmental Service. Such a person, especially if endowed with honesty and integrity of purpose, is kept from the service by all the influence of the higher Bureaucratic *régime*, for fear that by him the crass inadequacy of the whole organisation should be discovered, and that through him its innate corruption, peculation, and vice should be laid bare to the world in all its hideous reality.

The holder of a University degree need not apply for employment in this unique Government Service, for a University degree spells knowledge and a desire for progress, qualities which are unspeakably obnoxious to the Russian Bureaucrat.

Indeed, to-day it may be said with absolute truth that a student at the University is looked upon, first and foremost, as a revolutionary, and dangerous to the Powers that be. And so he is; and although his opinions lead him to act just now with rather thoughtless impetuosity, and in many respects with misdirected zeal, yet, on the whole, the Russian student's point of view is easily to be understood by those who will only take the trouble to search out the truth for themselves, for the student is a revolutionary in his inmost heart against all the vices of the Bureaucracy, and is dangerous to them alone.

Seeing that Bureaucracy is what it is, I make bold to forecast that the Russia of the future will afford the student class a place of honour in the nation's roll of patriots, and point them out to their successors as men who, filled with a conviction of their duties to their country, endeavoured nobly to carry them out.

Not only are they debarred from their country's service, but all University men known to hold political views contrary to those of the Bureaucracy need only apply for posts to be assured of being detained on suspicion, and, when a con-

venient opportunity occurs, being arrested and either sent to gaol in European Russia, or exiled to Siberia.

What wonder then that Russia is in the mire to-day—a bankrupt, financially, politically, socially,—when the service to which intelligence and education is thus denied entry is the Russian Public Service?

It is a fact that the majority of these functionaries holding high rank in the provinces of Russia are equipped with the most insufficient education and culture to enable them adequately to perform their duties, and in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, they are themselves sons of blind reactionaries, devotees to the system, bred and brought up in the Bureaucratic cradle.

As for the masses of Officialdom represented by the lower ranks of the service, spread like a gigantic network throughout the length and breadth of Russia, they are composed of the very essence of ignorance, and eighty per cent. of them are devoid of all pretensions to education, intellect, culture, or natural refinement.

In 1880 a careful research was made into the capabilities of functionaries of all grades employed

by Government in the public service. The results, in black and white, are as interesting as they are astounding. Of any given hundred, only two had had a superior education; five to six had finished their education in secondary schools; ten to twelve had had an infinitesimal smattering of knowledge doled out to them in primary schools; whilst eighty per cent. had *never been to school*, and had never known the nature of a competitive examination!

These are the types of men who to-day fill the minor Governmental posts—it is needless to add, with the utmost lack of ability, and to the utmost detriment to the public service.

What wonder then that Russia is floundering helplessly in the quicksands of retrogression, and that the Russian people are gasping for even the suspicion of a breath of an honest atmosphere in all matters social or otherwise, and that there is bred to such an extent that may prove ineradicable a feeling of distrust in connection with things Governmental, or in anything that has even the remotest connection with the Government? What wonder if the Russian people are struggling to free themselves from the Bureau-

cratic serpent which is strangling them and their country in its tenacious coils?

Mr Lecky, the late historian and politician, said : "Alexander III. reigned over an administration which is amongst the most despotic, and probably without exception the most corrupt and the most cruel, in Europe."

Alexander III., be it remembered, was the father of the present ruler, Nicholas II.; and what Mr Lecky said during his reign is even truer when said of the condition of affairs which holds good at this hour; and it will be true until a Government arises, composed of men imbued both with honest ideals, and with the requisite strength of character to carry them out, and advise their Sovereign accordingly.

I do not wish to say anything unjust of the Ministry presided over by M. Stolypin. He has yet to be tried—or, rather, one would say, his trial is now on; and although his methods up to date seem curiously unsuitable for the twentieth century, and he seems drifting into the old errors and the old ideas of his predecessors, whose chief axiom was that the people have no rights in an autocratic Government, yet we must wait a little

while longer, and give him an opportunity to develop any gigantic schemes that he may, for all we know, have evolved for the benefit of his country.

So far there has been no sign, and the clouds are gathering on the horizon; the Duma may open a new vista for us from which to draw deductions. There must come a time when the millions composed of the masses and Russia's soldiery will, willy nilly, be in possession of that modicum of education that will enable them to see at a glance that their true interests are with the intellectuals amongst the Russian people, and, as a consequence, do that which should have been done years ago—exterminate the Bureaucratic system, root and branch.

What is the basis of the system? Centralisation.

Mr Geoffrey Drage (I am quoting from memory) says: "If it is true that Centralisation made Russia, it is equally true that Decentralisation is the only thing calculated to permit her to live." And this statement is true through and through. Every branch of the Governmental system throughout Russia is swamped, ruined, and made useless by the system of Centralisation, a system which

might be very well designated as that which has as its fundamental principle the shifting of responsibility on to other people's shoulders.

Let us now look at the state to which Russia has been brought by this system. Firstly, what action or inaction has prepared the way for the hopeless chaos to be found in the official life of the country to-day?

In 1864 the *Zemstvos* were established—institutions similar in aspirations to our English County Councils, but differing in that they had vastly wider powers (on paper), and performed infinitesimally lesser deeds owing to the restrictions laid by Government on every action about to benefit the people, and lead to their enlightenment. Hope ran like wild-fire through the country, that at last Russia would see roads constructed, schools established, villages improved, reforms made in agricultural methods amongst the peasantry, etc., etc. But, alas! "hope deferred maketh the heart sick," and Russia is very, very sick to-day.

The Government no sooner gave a measure of self-government to the people with one hand, than it took it away with the other. Every-

body said, as they say to-day when news comes of some gigantic reform about to be launched, "What then are we going to lose *this* time?" There is no trust left in the people; the intentions of a Government run on the present lines will never more be believed in. "Lies, lies!" say the people, and judging by past experience, the people are right in their conjecture.

The year 1881 brought the assassination of Alexander II., and a consequent tide of hopeless reaction set in, fostered by M. Pobiedonostzeff, Procurator of the Holy Synod, and M. de Plehve, then Chief of Police. Liberty of popular action found itself still more restricted than of yore, and all institutions became more and more taken from the hand of the people and turned into Bureaucratic machines. The Justices of the Peace, a body of honourable men whom the people and peasantry had learned to trust and to respect, were thrown over, and officials, generally hopelessly ignorant, called *Zemski Natchalniki*, were appointed to dominate the *Zemstvos*, while higher officials, called *Ispravniks*, were appointed to dominate *them*, whilst the Governor of the province ruled over both—all being tools of the

Bureaucratic system. To these officials (mostly favourites of the ruling powers, and in nine cases out of ten absolutely ignorant of their duties) were handed the administrative affairs of the provinces. The *Zemstvos* met as of yore, it is true, but their real administrative power was less than *nil*, and depended entirely on the trio of *Tchinovniks* enumerated above, matters, as a fact, being generally left to the *Zemski Natchalnik*, as the work entailed by local affairs of the towns and villages was far too arduous for the other two officials to bother their heads about. So that to-day we find the *Zemski Natchalnik* managing all local affairs off his own bat, so to speak, and, as may be imagined, he does it unconscionably badly.

As a general rule, he does nothing but take bribes, which he, no doubt, calls "*honoraria*." It is a very delicate word to designate a catalogue of very damnable deeds. Recently the Press has been forbidden to publish complaints regarding his conduct — a truly Bureaucratic method of smothering the truth. "We have no more judges," said the peasants; "we have commanding officers." The *Zemstvos* and provincial *noblesse* fought the

situation, and at a great meeting held in Moscow in 1902, recommended to the Government as follows :

“(1.) An increase in education on broad lines.

“(2.) That the *Zemstvos* shall have larger powers, and be more representative.

“(3.) That peasants be placed on a footing with the rest of the nation.

“(4.) That all *impedimenta* to free discussions of economic questions, either orally or in the Press, be removed.”

And very reasonable requests, too, you will say, for 140,000,000 to make in the twentieth century !

Yes, very reasonable and extremely moderate ; but what was the result ? All were reprimanded by the Government : some, who were in Government Service, were dismissed from office, and three were *exiled to Siberia !*

Reaction followed reaction, and the advent of Nicholas II., whatever may be the beneficent intentions of that young ruler, has brought nothing but retrogression in its train. At the expense of popular liberty and to the advantage of Bureaucracy, till to-day we see widespread misery

throughout Russia — in town and village, house and *izba*.

And here, prior to the few remaining remarks which I have to make regarding the Bureaucratic *régime*, I wish to take my readers with me to these self-same villages and *izbas*, and show them the *effects* of this lack of reform, this incredible shirking of duty, that has been carried on, and is being carried on, in almost every town, village, and hamlet in Russia.

At the beginning of the chapter we noticed into what surroundings the Russian peasant babe is born. Then for months after he has begun his life he is deprived of Nature's chief gifts: he breathes the dank, stale fumes, the smoke, the *bacilli*-laden dust, and through his nostrils permeate the nauseous odours born of the conditions under which man and beast live in one conglomerate mass, herded together in the almost hermetically sealed Russian *izba*.

Is the lack of hygiene and sanitation compensated for by the food supplied to the wretched infant?

By no manner of means. The food is on a par with the rest of the conditions obtaining:

small cucumbers, black bread, water as often as not stagnant; and in the short-lived summer and autumn green apples are the only regular items of diet supplied to the unfortunate child. Milk is occasionally to be obtained, but it is the exception—at any rate, in many of the provinces of Central, South Eastern, and Southern Russia, especially Riazan, Orel, Samara, and Tamboff—to find anything like even an irregular supply of milk obtainable for the infants.

While travelling through the country last winter, time after time I found that either the peasantry had no cows, or else the latter were diseased or in too wretched and half-starved a condition to supply milk worthy of the name.

Then is nothing done for the newly-born children, for their mothers, and sick people generally, one might ask?

Yes—nominally. Vast tomes of statistics are supplied to Government yearly, showing what has been done to give relief, and how the sums of money laid aside out of the Revenue for this purpose have been expended.

I am bound to confess that, though I have travelled over vast areas of country, and through

many hundreds of villages, I have never been able to make the Government reports, or rather the reports made by the provincial *Tchinovniks* to the Government, tally with the impression that has been left upon my mind of the condition of any particular district that might be under discussion.

I have seen reports to the effect that in such and such a district there is a certain amount of "local scarcity" (an expression the Bureaucracy is very fond of), but no approach to real famine. I have seen this statement when I myself have but just travelled through that country, and been a pained witness of the most terrible suffering that can fall to the lot of man. I have seen reports to the effect that so many thousands of roubles have been expended in a certain district, and so much food. I have travelled there, and discovered that if any food *has* been distributed, it has been in amounts hardly worth mentioning, and of absolutely no avail in the relief of the starving peasantry. As for money—solid money—my experience is, that when one hears of that being distributed, one may set it down at once as a fairy tale.

There are, however, scattered as drops on the ocean through the vast regions of Russia, small hospitals or *Bolneetsas*, instituted by the *Zemstvos*, with the permission of the Government. Here one finds a collection of beds, varying in number from six to twelve, and the institution is presided over by a *Zemstvo* doctor, aided frequently by an assistant, sometimes in the person of a *Feldsher*, or old soldier, who has learnt something of medicine and surgery in war. But these *Bolneetsas* are few and far between.

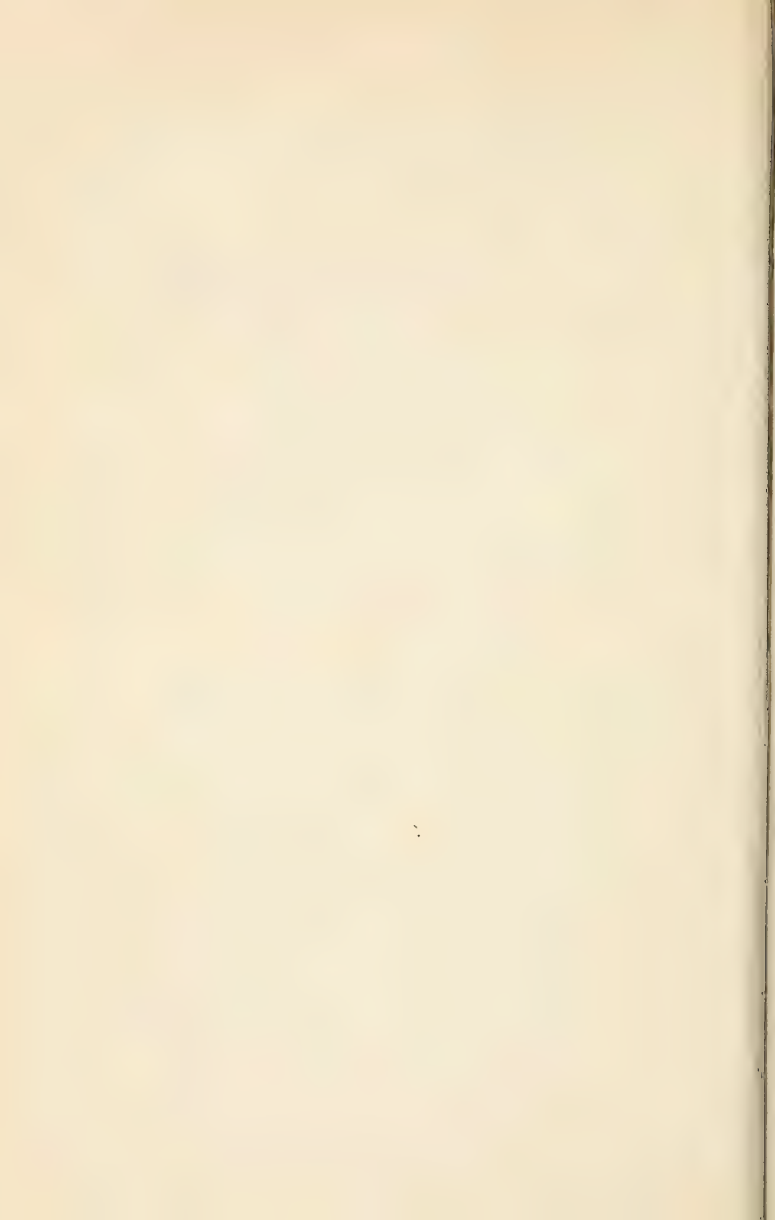
Peasants frequently have to travel twenty to thirty miles across a terribly forbidding and almost impassable country, and in the periods between winter and summer, and *vice versâ*, when the roads are practically non-existent. If the peasants should decide to go for the purpose of obtaining out-door relief at the *Bolneetsa*, it in many cases means a two days' journey there and back—for a bottle of medicine! It has been calculated recently that for the peasant population throughout Russia there is, on an average, *one doctor to every 30,000 people!* What this means amongst a poor and frequently half-starved community may be better imagined than described.



Siberian Peasants.



Refuge Hut on a desolate Moor.



Again, in these hard times, when cattle are being sold for the value of their skins in order to obtain food, when manure which should go to the soil is being burned as fuel, when *izbas* are being purposely pulled down to provide material for burning, when acorns and oak bark are being used as substitutes for bread—it is very rare to find a peasant family in possession of a horse and sleigh which can transport him to the far-away *Bolneetsa*.

At the same time it must be said that I have not found excessive kindness and charity amongst themselves a prominent feature in the nature of Russia's peasantry. True, they *have* sympathy with one another, and on occasion one has found a very deep sympathy existing in families; but speaking generally, there is an apathy, a callousness, bred of the still existing mediæval contempt of the male for the female. He has only married his better half in order to have a capable helpmeet about him. She has, in his opinion, no other functions to perform than the maternal one, and he considers he has honoured her enough by marrying her without doing anything further.

Then what right has she to be ill? It was not

part of the bargain. Then how can she expect his sympathy, or imagine that he will spend his time in driving her in the family sleigh or *tarantass* to the Hospital twenty miles away? No! such a thing is not to be thought of.

Again, if the children are ill, so much the worse for them—and it is God's will. God has given, perhaps He intends to take away. How often have I had it remarked to me by these ignorant beings, when endeavouring to exercise my medical skill amongst them: "*Barin* (master), the child is very bad—too ill too live. God does not intend that it shall live; it would evidently only grow up an invalid; it is not for us to go against His will and try to save it." And they don't. Indeed, your true *muzhik* is the Russian prototype of the Christian scientist and a decided Fatalist.

Further, times out of number I have heard such statements as the following. "*Barin*, the Doctor there is a bad man; he makes money out of his Hospital; he gives nothing but coloured water. What is the good of going twenty miles for nothing? He only gives us enough for three or four days; we must go many times to be cured." And they fear the very idea of being warded in

these *Bolneetsas*. The thought of an operation of any sort is terrifying to them. Put in a nutshell, the peasant abhors the very name of *Zemstvo Bolneetsa*.

It must be said at once that the peasants' complaints are based for the most part on ignorance of the real causes of the inability of the doctors to treat them properly. Distance, it may be said, forbids continuous treatment, and continuous treatment is frequently necessary. Further, the crass stupidity of the *mushik* makes it almost impossible to treat him as an intelligent patient and sensible being. He does not understand cleanliness. I have many times given a clean surgical dressing to one of the class, and impressed upon him that he must keep it clean in the paper that I have provided him with. Glance out of the window, and one sees him opening the paper, drawing out the dressing, and then having thoroughly examined it, and perhaps dropped it on the ground, place it minus the paper in his dirty sheepskin.

A peasant's idea of medicine is something that smells strong and tastes stronger; if these two attributes are not to be found in your medicine, he says to himself: "This medicine is no good;

and as for drinking it in teaspoonfuls, why, that is sheer nonsense"; and as often as not he drinks the whole bottle at a draught, with the idea that the whole is greater than the part, and will produce greater effects.

Drinking the entire contents of the wrong bottle is also not an infrequent occurrence, and I have seen a *muzhik*, to whom I had given a bottle of camphor liniment for the purpose of rubbing over his chest, and likewise a bottle of tonic for his general health, hand round one of these bottles to the occupants of his sleigh—his wife, son, and daughter—and finally, with uplifted arm, drain the receptacle to its uttermost dregs. Dire were the results—for, on the whole party returning to me in a doubled-up condition, with their hands clasped in sore distress over their stomachs, I discovered that the camphor liniment had gone by the board down their unfortunate throats, and the tonic remained untouched!

This is no isolated instance. I could name a legion of such. I have had patients drink the poisonous lead lotion which had been given for their ulcered legs—and wittingly too, "for," said they, "I thought that as it did so much good outside,

it must act as well on the inside." So they attacked the obnoxious sore on both sides, front and rear, with results which I leave to my medical brethren to imagine.

Once I gave a patient in Central Russia some tincture of iodine, with minute instructions to paint it round his neck. A few days afterwards he came to me in the direst distress. His neck was well, but he had a terrible story to tell. Such wonders had the iodine worked on his neck, that he determined to try the effect on his infant child, who had a rather distended abdomen, and cried all night. He therefore painted the child front and back, leaving not one spot untouched. Strange to say, the drastic remedy had not the desired effect, but only succeeded in producing cries of the most intense agony in the poor little mite.

What was to be done? Evidently he must call in the local *Feldsher*. This being appeared, and with a learned face and many long speeches declared that I was to blame, but that he could, by the exercise of skill which God had vouchsafed to him alone, cure the child; but he added that if it was God's will that the child

should die, even after he (the *Feldsher*) had expended his mysterious incantations and yet more mysterious medicine, then of course that was not *his* affair. So he proceeded to apply a large belladonna plaster over the whole area covered by the iodine, and gave him a nauseous mess internally, which made the child vomit throughout the entire night. The *Feldsher*, called in haste, demonstrated to the satisfaction of all that it was the effect of the Doctor's medicine working off; he had in fact driven my wicked concoction out of the child's system. He then ordered a diet of herbs and *cucumber!* — the child was barely *two* years old, let me remark — and with the final sage remark that the child might "possibly vomit again," as there might be some of my medicine left, he departed — with his fee!

The child died, exhausted with pain, and the father seemed absolutely incapable of understanding that it was *he* who had done wrong in the first instance, and unwisely in the second in not coming straight to me.

I took the trouble to go and see that *Feldsher*, feeling quite willing to teach him a

little elementary medicine; but on my informing him that the child had died, he crossed himself ten times in succession, and with an air of conscious pride, born as it were of his superior knowledge, said: "Fools! Fools! they always wait till they are very ill before calling me in. God's will! God's will!" I left him swathed in ignorance, seeing clearly that all my arguments would fall like water on a duck's back, and that his innate feeling of superior knowledge forbade the imbibing of further instruction.

One more instance, to show my readers what obstacles a medical man has to contend against in endeavouring to aid these wretched creatures. Only two weeks ago I was stopping at a certain estate in this, the Western district of Vitebsk Government, when a peasant arrived in urgent haste and implored me to go at once to see his brother, who was sorely ill.

I went at once, and discovered that the man had a slight twist of the intestine, which had caused obstruction and great pain. By dint of much good luck and the ordinary remedies, I succeeded in unravelling the organ, and putting the patient at rest. I applied certain remedies

by means of an enema, but — and this is the point—gave no internal medicine.

Now if you give no medicine and no ointment — *Maz*, as the peasants say — to rub over the part affected, your treatment must of necessity be woefully inadequate.

Then witness the sequel. I journeyed to see the man two days after, and found him lying in an exhausted state — pallid, haggard, and evidently *in extremis*. Dumbfounded at this spectacle, I asked his relatives what had happened. What had he eaten? I had ordered, I may remark, a diet of milk. Said they: "He can eat nothing, he could not drink the milk, and it had no effect on him. [It is necessary for the Russian peasant to *see* effect before his very eyes.] Then we tried to make him take a little meat and cucumber"! This was bad enough, and accounted for a good deal, but I was convinced that some other means had been employed to "bring him round."

I then examined the poor man, and came to the conclusion that rupture had taken place, and that his hours on earth were few. He died within three hours of my arrival. The relatives

obstinately refused to enlighten me with any details of the supplementary treatment, which I felt sure had been dealt out to him with no unsparing hand; and it was only when I chanced upon the chemist of a neighbouring townlet or large village of some 2000 to 3000 inhabitants that I discovered the truth.

Briefly, the facts were these: I had given no medicine nor *Maz*, so a consultation was held, and the *Feldsher*, living five to six *versts* away, was hastily summoned. He arrived, and condemned my treatment, and proceeded to deluge the unfortunate man with a quantity of nauseous mixtures, which caused a violent upheaval of the already injured intestine, to say nothing of terrific vomiting and diarrhœa. This went on for some hours, during which time no doubt the fatal rupture took place.

Great agony preceded the rupture, which the *Feldsher* said he had anticipated, and gave further purgatives, and (as the relatives said) "*shook him standing up and lying down*"! "But," said they, "*even* this did not relieve him, so, when the *Feldsher* had gone, we asked Marie Ivanovitch to see him."

Marie Ivanovitch, an old hag who dealt in ghostly incantations, and had a great reputation as a wonder-working *Babooshka* (old woman) or *Znakhaka*, arrived, and giving in turn her list of abominations, proceeded to perform certain weird deeds on her unfortunate patient, one of which consisted in "spitting into his mouth," and another sitting on his abdomen, and turning as on a pivot six times without ceasing, muttering an incantation. If anything had been needed to complete the rupture, this drastic remedy would have succeeded — and indeed the relatives told the chemist that shortly after the treatment described, "he became quite quiet, and seemed to have no pain." I need not point out to my medical colleagues that the overtaxed bowel had yielded to the methods of the *Feldsher* and *Znakhaka*, and he died.

Need I say more? I think not, except to give a few details of the life-history of these *Feldshers*, in whom the Russian peasantry have such trust. As a rule, he is an old soldier who, during his military career, has learned to bandage and apply a plaster; and if a military medicine chest has come into his keeping, he has, by the simple

expedient of trying one drug after another on his unfortunate comrades, discovered which have a tendency to cure and which to kill.

In the Russo-Japanese War I came across many of these medical tyros, destined at a later date to practise their art, with an air as learned as the most pedagogical consultant in Harley Street, on their brethren in the Russian villages. I had numerous conversations with these people, and well remember one in particular.

I asked this unqualified practitioner how he arrived at a diagnosis, at the same time taking care to assume an interested air, as of a pupil towards his teacher. He was duly flattered, and gave me the following instructive answer, embodying a treatment which I give for the benefit of our big London Hospitals, where so much time and care is expended in the diagnosis of each malady.

Said he: "*Barin*, when men feel ill, they want medicine, and medicine you must give. If you refuse medicine, they think you do not know what medicine to give; therefore I always say, 'You are really very ill—*very* ill.' Then they know

at once that I understand their case, and will take anything I give. I have many mixtures of medicines which I made myself, and I know by experience now [a significant word that *now*] what is their effect on most men. If they are sick, and bring one medicine up, I know that that was the wrong one and I give another. If he is again sick, or the desired result is not obtained, I have a remedy which will make any man bring up all the contents of his stomach, and this done, I know that I can start on fresh ground." Horrified at the heroic measures thus blandly discovered to me, but preserving the same expression suggestive of my thirst for knowledge, I asked, "And suppose he dies."

Here the learned man drew his coat around him with one hand, and raised the other hand significantly above his head, pointing to the heavens. "*Barin*," said he, with the utmost gravity, "God made all men, and the sick man and the physician are equally His creation. Then it is certain that if He permits my patients to die, that is not my affair; and it would be wrong of me to blame Him or to be blamed myself by any one else."

There, my friend, is sublime faith and comfortable resignation in the power of the Creator and the ways of Destiny.

The *Feldsher's* methods are born to a great extent of his and the peasants' belief in superstition, and these methods are freely used in confinements. One of the most frequent means resorted to is for the *Feldsher* to stand upright on the unfortunate woman, then, while she spits repeatedly, he takes a series of leaps first to this side of the bed and then to that over the patient as she lies, and finally spits at the open door. By this means the Devil, the cause of the difficult confinement, is driven away, and the labour proceeds peacefully.

But one will say, "How is it that the Russian peasantry as a race are such fine specimens of manhood, if brought up under such conditions?"

I will answer that not only is it a fact that the peasant race is degenerating in physique in reality, but that also when one *does* see fine specimens, it simply means that the fittest survived. The mortality, especially during periods when food is scarce, as is the case this year, is immense. Ordinarily the mortality is

the greatest in Europe—33-36 per 1000; but in years such as this, and indeed last year, that percentage in no wise represents the correct figure.

In fifty villages taken at random in the Governments of Riazan, Veronest, and Orel, through which I was travelling *last winter*, those villages having populations ranging from 600-2000 people, I found an almost constant mortality of 70-80 per 1000 inhabitants. Further, I invariably found that 80 per cent. of this number was composed of babies and young children. The birth-rate, however, though decreasing, is still high—48 per 1000—and the population of Russia increases by 2,000,000 every year.

An interesting institution in connection with these young children is the Foundling Hospital of Moscow. In this enormous building I am informed that from 14,000-17,000 are received annually—carried there by their mothers from all parts of the Empire: from the frozen soil of Archangel, and the sunny regions of the Caucasus, from far-away Yakutsk, in the bleak wastes of Siberia, and from Manchuria's northern borders. Here they find refuge, here they are labelled, and an entry made such as—"No. 7416:

a boy, six weeks old. — Received 8th January 1906, at 2 P.M."; and how often does one see after the entry: "No. 7416—died, buried."

On arrival, the child is invariably conveyed to the chapel, and received into the Greek Church, is baptized, named, and commences its existence with a certificate such as the following attached: "No 18416: boy; baptized Peter Vassielivitch. Received 10th June.—Healthy. Placed amongst the infants at the breast."

The mortality in this Institution is immense, as may be imagined. Not only do the long journeys to which they are frequently exposed act as the cause of death shortly after arrival, but it can be understood that the system of wet-nurses would have to be perfect indeed to afford good nutriment to each child. But one wet-nurse may have three, four, or five children to suckle, and the results can be gauged! I am informed that the mortality is 65-70 per cent. annually.

Further, it may be said that notwithstanding the benefit to those infants, who may be snatched from the jaws of winter and a peasant life, to be educated as decent human beings, yet the

47
50
Institution has a direct drawback in the use that is made of it as a sink to which the products of illegitimacy may be brought, to say nothing of those unnaturally cruel mothers, who bring their children here to get them out of the way, for no questions are asked here. However, from the purely educational point of view, the Institution is worthy of all praise, and places the children there deposited in an incomparably better position than their little brethren in the villages from whence they hail. For what has a Bureaucratic Administration provided up to date in the shape of institutions for the education of peasants? Literally, nothing.

From my own observations, and from information I have gleaned from people who have traversed the limits of the Empire, I believe that I am not exaggerating when I give the average percentage of the peasantry who are able to read and write but moderately well at from 2-5 per cent.

My first series of observations led me to put the figure a little higher, but I have since drawn the lamentable conclusion that even my first meagre percentage was above the mark. Go

where one will through Russia, one finds little or no provision made for the rising generation. Russia's millions of young minds are being fed on nothing but police laws. Schools are here and there dotted throughout the immense regions, but in such scanty numbers that it is impossible for more than a very few to make use of the facilities afforded for education. I have reason to think that at least 60 per cent. up to last year were not receiving any education at all; and since the beginning of the troubles of last year, when the police have been multiplied in direct proportion as the schools have been decreased, I have no hesitation in affirming that the percentage of untaught children given above is far behind the mark. Schools have been closed, teachers imprisoned, and the whole system of organisation, which it is said had begun to be developed throughout the country (although one saw little of this great wave of progress), was nipped in the bud. Bureaucracy determined to fight against intellect, and the attempt to oust them from the country, by leaving the peasant masses in ignorance, so that they at least should be retained in the mire, unacquainted with the

evils of the Administration by which they are ruled. They determined that at any rate the peasants' eyes should remain shut as long as possible, realising that their own strength lay in the ignorance and bestial condition of the peasant.

In the villages in which schools are to be found, more often than not owing to the beneficence of the local proprietor, whose action always lays him open to the tyranny of the military and police, we find the teachers labouring under such restrictions that make it *impossible* for them to make even a shallow pretence of teaching.

Many cases came to my knowledge last winter, and also this, of sudden visits being made to schools by the chief of the local police, who, after examining the books of instruction and listening to the system of teaching, ordered the school to be shut, giving as a reason that, in his opinion, the instruction given to the pupils was calculated to make them revolutionaries. In many schools I have heard that the old Slav alphabet is taught, and such passages from the Scriptures as are deemed by the local police to have no bearing on practical politics.

Last year I was fortunate enough to witness a descent on a village by the police. Here the priest was a suspect, and also the teacher. Be that as it may, history was being read to the boys, and the unwise teacher made some very commonplace remark *re* the fact that our King ✓ Charles I. lost his head. The remark was made, I have since thought, to show me the depth of the teacher's knowledge. At any rate, at the mention of a king being executed, the ignorant Police Inspector frowned, and immediately gave orders to his satellites to close the school. To teach the children that such a subject could be even thought of, much less discussed, was nothing short of treason. The lesson was stopped, the school shut, and is still shut, and the teacher marched off under arrest.

Priests (although such instances are rare, as they are as a rule Bureaucrats) have been hurried to gaol for what has been termed "seditiously instructing" their flock, and in the majority of cases when the books of a school have been removed, it has been History that has suffered the brunt of the censorship. The Bureaucrat loathes History as he loathes the sight of a free

man, for History teaches people what has been in the past, and leads them to draw comparisons between their own country and others.

The peasantry must not know what a pig-sty they live in, must not know what the peasantry of other lands are like, must not know of French Revolutions and executions of kings and queens; that is dangerous to Bureaucracy. The peasantry may know anything except the Truth, and the Bureaucrat will expend the last *kopek* of the people's money in the effort to stop them knowing that. Consequently the police are given *carte blanche*. They are responsible to no one, and do exactly as they please, using the authority placed in their hands in the most senseless, absurd, and childlike way, and performing their duties in a most cruel and inhumane manner.

Amongst most of the police officials common-sense seems at a discount; they seem incapable of bringing tact of any sort whatever to bear on any situation that arises. Brutality and rudeness are the only qualities that they appear to have; and especially is this the case in the country districts, where, far removed from the eye of the central authorities, they do as they please with

the peasantry, extorting money or kind from them by threats or actual punishment, and stopping at nothing in order to terrorise them for the purpose of making them simple tools for their own ends.

My experience of the village policeman is that he is literally king of the country in which he has his beat, and is, as a rule, nothing better than a tyrant. His word is law; it is always taken as the truth in preference to the statements of the *muzhik*; and it would cause the eyes of our English country villagers to open if the local policeman was to take it into his head to clear them from the interior of the village inn, or force them to make way for some personage, say the Squire, by thrusting himself amongst them, and boxing their ears indiscriminately. Yet such is an everyday sight in Russia, and the mob of patient peasantry raises not a murmur, but disperses helter-skelter at the rude bidding of the representative of Russia's worst and most to be deprecated branch of the Bureaucratic system.

Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace tells the story of a village policeman or *ovriadnik*, who, happen-

ing to find a dead body, made a huge sum of money by carrying it about on his sleigh from village to village, and announcing that he had discovered it outside the village. He so frightened the ignorant peasants with threats to have them punished for the deed, that they acceded to any demand he made, on the condition that he would not proceed against them.

✓ I think I can cap that from my own experiences.
§2 A couple of policemen killed a *muzhik* by brutal treatment, but not content with that, actually had the audacity to carry the body from village to village, as stated above, and fleece the unfortunate peasantry.

Morals are not to be found amongst the minions of the Bureaucracy. "Complain," you say. How? You might just as well say that the unfortunate peasantry whom I related drank camphor liniment should read the labels. They cannot read, neither can they write; and further than this, if they *could*, who is going to print their complaints? The local paper? My readers, Russia is not England. Those letters, if printed, would mean the shutting of the paper office, and the Bureaucratic official veto on the publishing of the paper.



Village School and Priest.
(The School Teacher is on the right of the picture.)



Siberian Peasant and his Izba.

The local Censor, generally the Governor of the province, or at any rate his officials, are not going to permit any truths to appear regarding the Bureaucratic System, so that it is impossible for complaints to be heard. If a paper bolder than the rest takes the risk, and without showing the Censor the next day's edition, prints and publishes it, and it contains attacks against the iniquitous *régime*, that paper is immediately suppressed for ever, and, as a rule, the editor arrested and committed to gaol — as a Revolutionary. Frequently the editor of a local paper is ready with his proofs for the edition of the following day, and has sent copies to the Governor's office, but hour after hour goes, and there is no sign of the expected messenger with the permission for the printing of the paper. The editor and his assistants wait wearily through the long night hours, and it is no uncommon thing for them to give the vigil up in disgust, and go home, no edition of the paper appearing the following day, simply because the Censor has probably been at a big dinner-party or ball, and has not taken the trouble to read the proofs submitted.

All last year there was, and there still is, a strict

✓ censorship exercised over all papers, letters, and pamphlets entering the Russian villages. I know of many villages where enlightened proprietors have erected a small library for the peasants in his village, and the villages around. With what result? The police have raided the village, seized the books, and fined the proprietor.

A lady I know in Orel hired four rooms, and fitted them out as a club and reading-room for the peasantry and artisans. Three days elapsed after it had been started when the police arrived, beat the peasants brutally whom they found there reading, took the books, and closed the building. Deeds such as these are legion.

A Russian proprietor of my acquaintance permitted the peasantry to use a large room in his country house in order that they might meet there, and discuss social questions and village affairs. No action was taken by the police till my friend himself went down to the country to aid in their deliberations for the good of the village. The following day he was told that he would be sent to gaol for three months if he did not pay the police two hundred roubles as a fine for "talking politics" to his peasantry.

Thus restricted, how can humane and enlightened proprietors aid the peasantry to rise from their bed of ignorance, and how can the peasantry be expected to do much towards aiding themselves? Born into a world bounded by the limits of his own village, and ruled nominally by the Tzar but actually by police as ignorant and incapable as they are brutal, the young peasant child early imbibes that sense of servitude, that servile obedience to authority, which makes him the cringing being he is. He is born a serf to authority, a slave to police oppression, whatever the laws of the country may endeavour to make us believe to the contrary.

Nevertheless, the Russian peasant, properly trained and properly led, makes a fine soldier, although lacking initiative. From the earliest times this has been the case. Witness the tribute paid to him by a poet during the reign of the great Catherine II.:

“The Russian, hunger, thirst, fatigue subdues,
His foe across each desert wild pursues,
Dares adverse fortune, dares impending fate,
And, prodigal of life, is bravely great.
Humble yet proud, his banners wide unfurled
Guide but his arm, he'll subjugate the world.”

But alas! these fine soldiers are so lamentably ignorant that up to the present day they have not seemed to grasp the fact that an ignorant and crafty Bureaucracy merely use them as tools to keep their own kith and kin in subjection. Strange irony, that peasants should go on day after day permitting themselves to be the means of keeping their own fathers, mothers, and sisters in a state of serfdom, whereas, if they only thought for one moment, they would realise that without their aid the Bureaucracy would be powerless to retain them in the disgraceful position they are in to-day.

But the Governments of Russia have so far been crafty. One never sees a regiment of soldiers in a province from which they themselves have been recruited. No! that would be too dangerous. Those from the North are sent South, those from the East are sent West, and *vice versa*, so that the innate brutality in the Russian soldier may not be softened while "quelling" disorder by finding himself called to give the quietus to his aged father or young brother. And so the Russian world goes on—back, back, ever back. Reaction follows reaction. Every year since 1887 has seen

fresh Governmental Decrees placing restrictions on this, that, and the other—education, the press, free speech, and the liberty of the person.

Meanwhile the restrictions of the people's rights naturally raised indignation and riots, and to combat these Bureaucracy proclaimed a state of siege in Petersburg and other large towns, whilst the Minister of the Interior was endowed with power to suspend all Imperial Decrees, and had immediate power over life and death. Mr Geoffrey Drage says that in his memorial to Nicholas II. in 1903, M. Demchinski said that when the Minister of the Interior wished to hang a man he had but to proclaim the state of enforced protection in a particular district. That district then became "outside the law," and any number of men could be killed by the mere order of the Governor-General.

A new police system was formed, by which every police official had the power to arrest without trial, and exile without appeal. Warsaw is ground down under this system at the present moment; and to such excesses do the military go that I am convinced that neither the Tzar nor M. Stolypin have any idea of the state of things that exist there.

M. Stolypin has said: "It will be our aim to do away with Bureaucracy." May strength and courage be granted him to accomplish his object, will be the fervent wish of all honest men and lovers of justice.

The "justice" carried on in Warsaw to-day is nothing less than criminal—and I do not speak without knowledge, for I have had friends—*innocent* friends—suffer terribly by that same "justice." In a pamphlet recently issued by the Society called the "Alliance of the Russian People," the members of which choice gathering are the worst type of reactionaries and Bureaucrats, and are designated by the people as the "Black Hundred," appear the following humane and civilised suggestions for the maintenance of order in Russia amongst the people: Crimes against Government, life, robbery, incendiarism, unlawful preparation, preservation, transport, carriage, and use of explosives and instruments of anarchists and revolutionaries, participants in their crimes, receiving of suspected goods, housing of suspected persons, forcible prevention of work and the closing of industrial and merchandise establishments, the damaging of

bridges, roads, and machines with the aim of interrupting activity or stopping work, arming against authority, propagating revolutionary ideas in the army; instigating women and minors to any of the crimes above mentioned *must be punished by the Death Sentence!*

How can a country progress when under the thumb of people of this type? how can institutions thrive? how can people exist? It is impossible. Peep into any Government Office in town or country, and see the *working* habits of the Bureaucratic *régime*. Travel to any part of Russia you will, and take any branch of any one part of the Administration, and examine its methods. You will soon discover that Russia is behind every other country in the world, either civilised or anywhere near being civilised.

Let us take, for instance, the Russian Post Office, and enter the post-house of a small town of from 5000 to 10,000 inhabitants. Darkness; a multitude of figures, caps respectfully in hand, waiting patiently with that patience which only Russians have, before a small aperture closed by a thick foot-square pane of glass, which occasionally is drawn aside to disclose the head of a

Russian postal official, who, with a growl, as if the public had no right there, demands what is wanted. "Letters, papers, etc., for the village of X," says he who is fortunate enough to be first in the long list of patient waiters. "*Tak*" ("So"), says the sphinx-like face, and the glass is closed to with a bang, while the powers that be in that Post Office discuss a cigarette and tea, and decide whether they may deliver without suspicion these letters, and also ascertain if they have read all they wished in the papers.

Patience on the one side, exasperating delay on the other: but you cannot hurry a Russian *Tchinovnik* — such a thing is impiety; he is king of his bureau, which is for him and his myrmidons a place wherein to sleep, sit, and drink tea and absorb perquisites. The public is dirt; it is not even taken into account.

After five to ten minutes the glass is again drawn aside, and either the letters are handed over or else, if the *Natchalnik* or post-master wishes to be nasty, he will demand as a proof of identity (although he may have known you for months) to see the passport; and if the unfortunate individual has not his passport with

him, back go the letters into the obscurity of the Bureaucratic den.

Further justification can always be found amidst the masses of Bureaucratic laws, the second of which invariably contradicts the first for detaining letters or packets in order to send them for examination to the Censor for the detection of fancied iniquities, revolutionary ideas, or Nihilistic implements of warfare.

Delay in the Russian post and in every Governmental bureau is king. The public is not studied in any way, and expedition in their business is of no importance to the *Tchinovnik*, since he has no other wish than to sleep, sit, smoke, drink tea, eat, and revel in the feeling of impenetrable mystery which surrounds the dealings of every Government official, and which impresses nine-tenths of the masses of the people with an awesome sense of their dignity, sitting there taking counsel together, their deliberations presided over by that never-lacking feature in a Russian public office—the full-length portrait of His Majesty, the Tzar of all the Russias. First and foremost amongst his duties, your true Bureaucrat considers it his duty to *write*. What-

ever you may require beyond the purchase of stamps needs pages of writing, which mean nothing and guarantee less. Your Russian official says: "Yes, if your packet or letter is not received, we will pay you ten roubles," or more, as the case may be. What happens? Your letter is detained, perhaps for weeks, by the Censor, until he has leisure to read it. You complain that your letter has not been received. "Oh," says the official; "*sechas, sechas*; you cannot know if it is lost. Wait; your friends will receive it." And your friends perhaps *do* receive it, weeks and months after the time of sending it; and the official says with triumph and unctuous rectitude: "See, your letter was not lost! the Russian post cannot make a mistake."

It is true, nothing is ever lost in Russia; it is only *deposited*. No scheme is ever absolutely negatived; it is postponed — *indefinitely*. No Russian official ever gives you a clear, straightforward answer. He either lies straight out, or he says "*Sechas* (Wait a bit), we will see what can be done." That means he will wait to see whether any money will be put into his pocket by the transaction.

Robbery from top to bottom of the Bureaucratic system ; and not content with robbing the Russian people of their money and liberty, they seek to rob them of knowledge.

All literature or letters entering the country that the Bureaucracy deem breathe a progressive spirit, it blacks with indelible ink, so that its children, the 140,000,000 of the great Russian race, shall not imbibe other nourishment than what Bureaucracy considers good for it, and, above all, shall not know what Bureaucracy most fears—the Truth !

Wander where you will amidst the official network which strangles Russia in its grasp, and you find Bureaucracy sitting behind its little window, and peering out upon the world and upon the public as a prison warder spying at criminals. Suspicion reigns, and Centralisation and Delay are the gods of Government. Documents in piles must be written before even the simplest wants can be attended to, much less satisfied ; and one *Tchinovnik* after the other must see these documents, and add yet more meaningless hieroglyphics, and take a yet larger sum according to his rank from the pockets of the

Russian public, before he deigns to set his cramped brain, sodden with years of formality and red tape, to work.

And when the Bureaucrat *does* condescend to work, his first idea is, "How much can I put in my own pocket?" And, be it understood, it is not the public he takes into account; he is only anxious as to how the *Tchinovnik* above him will act if he in his turn finds that his subordinate pocketed more than his rank permitted him to—for Bureaucracy fears a superior Tchin, and cowers abjectly beneath the foot of superior official rank in exact proportion as it has unmitigated contempt for the people. Bureaucracy lives for Bureaucracy, and nothing else; the formalities attending Tchin must be honoured first before the public needs can possibly be thought of; and in nine cases out of ten the formalities consist in the wholesale robbery of the public by the hundred and one titled *Tchinovniks*, until for the actual object for which any funds may have been voted—famine, public institution, battle-ship, etc., etc.—nothing remains but statistics and an imposing array of documents stamped with the Imperial Eagle.

"Fill your own pocket first," is the Russian official motto, and everybody knows it and expects it, so nobody is surprised at anything. Nobody was surprised during the Japanese War, when the boxes supposed to contain food, drugs, clothing for the Army, arrived at Harbin, bearing bricks and straw. How many thousands I myself saw opened containing these materials in Harbin I prefer to forget; but I remember well that the porters and the station officials called the supply trains the "bricks and straw trains." Nobody was surprised when the money for a battle-ship was squandered by one man on his dissolute acquaintances in Petersburg, and on the buying of estates. Nobody was surprised, when after Liao Yang new guns were required, it was discovered that the supply of these weapons at the chief arsenal in the country had been exhausted, all of them having been melted down and sold before the war.

And who effected all these honourable transactions, at the expense of their country, at the expense of Russia's sons, fighting weaponless and unclothed in the Far East? The Russian Bureaucrat.

It would be unjust to a considerable number of men to deny the existence of all honesty amongst the members of the Bureaucracy; but they are few and far between. Russia's chief satirist, the great Gogol, provides us with an accurate picture of Russian official life as it is to-day. I recommend him to those of my readers who would wish to see confirmed what I have written. The Russian people may be all that is desirable, and I for one am a sincere friend and well-wisher of the *real* Russian people; but in any affair connected with Russia to-day, people are not dealing with the real Russian people—it to all intents and purposes does not exist; they are dealing with the Russian Bureaucrat, who, whatever may be the honest aspirations of Tzar, Premier, or Government, rules Russia to-day; and no dealings with Russia—political, social, or financial—can be considered seriously till there arises a Government strong enough and able enough, in combination with the united will of the people, to abolish Bureaucracy, and sweep it off the face of Russia.

And then? Then there are other cords encircling our unfortunate friend, cords which bind

him to superstition, and consequently to ignorance—the cords of the Church. Not that the priest himself, as a *man*, has actually a great deal of influence over the peasant, as I shall attempt to show; but the priest, as the living representative of a Church which he fears, is likewise feared. The power of the Church is undeniable amongst the peasantry. The Russian child is born and bred in superstition, and that fact has an effect on his disposition and character not easily overestimated.

From the *Secret Memoirs of the Court of Catherine II.*, written in French by an author who remains anonymous, I take the following:

“It has often been made matter of reproach to Religion that her most zealous defenders are not always the best of men in their own characters. Russia in particular affords matter in support of this sarcasm. It is there that the most illiterate, the most degenerate sect of Christianity still substitutes dogmas in the place of morals; miracles instead of reason; the performance of ceremonies instead of the practice of virtue. The principal causes of the vices of the people is the immorality of their religion, and he who considers that in the Russo-Greek Church there are neither sermons nor exhortations nor catechisms will be at once

of my opinion. A sort of auricular confession, but very different from that of the Catholic, is the only act which reminds the Russian of a few of his duties ; but all that the confessor enjoins him consists in fasting, repeating Litanies, and making the sign of the Cross. One of the chief causes of the vices and ignorance of the Russian priests is to be ascribed to the Greek religion itself, which prohibits them to read any book except their Breviary, to employ themselves in any occupation, to do any work, or to play on any instrument of music. Besides the fifty-two Sundays in the year, the Russians celebrate sixty-three festivals. In the towns these are days of pomp, balls, and feasting ; in the villages—drunkenness and disorder. The most despicable and most despised of all persons in Russia are the priests. Many of them cannot even read ; yet they are more despicable for their drunkenness and intemperance than for their gross ignorance. There are seminaries for their tuition, indeed ; but it is not always necessary for a man to have been educated in them in order to become a priest. A father bequeaths to his son his living, his church, and his flock ; for this he wants nothing but the consent of his lord, who easily obtains that of the bishop. If the son be able as his father was before him to read a little in the Slavon language, say Mass, and chant vespers, he is master of his trade, and follows it. He often gets drunk and fights with his parishioners, who, not-

withstanding, kiss his hand and ask his blessing after they have given him a drubbing. On certain days in the year these popes make the tour of their parishes, demanding from hut to hut, eggs, butter, flax, fowls, etc. On their return they are seen either lying dead drunk in their cart amongst the provisions, or merrily singing from this moving pulpit. It is not uncommon in the streets of Moscow and Petersburg to meet drunken priests and monks, reeling along, swearing, singing, and insulting the passers-by, male and female. // The common people observe with the most scrupulous exactitude the four grand Lents which are enjoined them, and at which times their superstition carries them far. The conscience of a Russian would not be so much affected by a theft or a murder from which he might obtain absolution as by having eaten meal, milk, or an egg during Lent. Every Russian, besides the consecrated amulet he wears about his neck which he receives at his baptism, and which he never lays aside, commonly carries in his pocket a figure of St Nicholas or other patron saint, stamped on gold, silver, or brass. A Russian nobleman's god accompanies him on his journeyings. He is clothed in silver and gold, and on his arrival at his journey's end, the image is placed by the servant in his master's room, who immediately honours him with his prostrations. A certain Russian Princess had always a large silver crucifix following her in a separate carriage. When anything fortunate happened

during the day, or she was satisfied with her admirers, she had lighted candles placed about the crucifix, and said to it, 'See now, as you have been very good to-day, you shall have candles all night. I will love you—I will pray to you!' If anything occurred to vex the lady, she extinguished the candles, forbade the servants to pay any homage to the poor image, and loaded it with reproaches and revilings."

Now let us glance at the status of the priest in the nineteenth century—a hundred years after the above was written. I will quote from the pages of Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace the translation of a secret report made by M. Melnikoff, "an orthodox Russian, celebrated for his extensive knowledge of Russian life," to the Grand Duke Constantine:—

"The people," we read, "do not respect the clergy, but persecute them with derision and reproaches, and feel them to be a burden. In nearly all the popular comic stories the priest, his wife, or his labourer is held up to ridicule. The people shun the clergy, and have recourse to them not from the inner impulse of conscience but from necessity. And why do the people not respect the clergy? Because it forms a class apart; because having received a false education, it does not introduce into the life of the people the teaching of the

Spirit, but remains in the mere dead forms of outward ceremonial; because the clergy itself continually presents examples of want of respect to religion, and transforms the service of God into a profitable trade. 'Can the people respect the clergy when they hear how one priest stole money from below the pillow of a dying man, how another was publicly dragged out of a place of ill fame, how a third while officiating at the Easter service was dragged by his hair from the altar by the deacon. Is it possible to respect priests who spend their time in the spirit-shop, write fraudulent petitions, fight with the Cross in their hands, and abuse each other in bad language at the altar.' Is it possible for the people to respect the priests, when they see everywhere among them simony, carelessness in performing the religious ceremonies, and disorder in administering the sacraments? Is it possible for the people to respect the clergy when they see that truth has disappeared from it, and that the Consistories, guided in their decisions by bribery, destroy in it the last remains of truthfulness? If we add to this the false certificates which the clergy give to those who do not wish to partake of the Eucharist, the dues illegally extracted from old Ritualists, the conversion of the altar into a source of revenue, the giving of churches to priests, daughters as a dowry, and similar phenomena, the question as to whether the people can respect the clergy requires no answer."

Here are pictures of our village priest in the not so very distant past which need no comment; but much can be said to exculpate them from blame, and their status as depicted then and now. From my own personal observation and knowledge gained whilst living with them, I can unhesitatingly state there is a great improvement in the class as a whole. There is much to be deprecated even now, and many black sheep to be found amongst them, but the general tone is a great deal higher. However, still there remains that want of intimacy, that lack of respect between priest and parishioner, which is essential for the peasant's well-being, and for the maintenance of anything like reverence for their religion.

The Russian clergy are called Black and White. The Black are the cloistered clergy of the monasteries, and hold a more revered, more respected position than their brethren, the White—secular or village priests. The latter may be seen any day in the Russian villages, clothed in their long brown gowns; wide-awake, tall, felt black hats, or those of velvet trimmed with fur; their long black hair falling in ringlets down their backs and over their shoulders, while their

long beards give them a venerable appearance, as they walk with sedate step, aided by a long brown stick studded at the handle with a silver knob.

The priests were originally elected by the parishioners, but the Bishops found that such illiterate people were presented as the choice of the peasantry, that they at last decided to choose for themselves those fit to be priests. This led to the formation of a seminary for the sons of the clergy, and as the outcome of this arose the absolute separation of the White Priest class as a distinct clerical family, keeping severely to itself, and admitting no outsiders to its ranks. And indeed no outsiders were needed, for a "White Clergy" clerical proletariat, owing to the excessive multiplication of the children of the priests, was soon formed, and the surplus (that party of them which were unfortunate enough not to be provided with livings) were hard put to it to exist.

This fact alone will be easily understood to have had a deleterious effect on the White Clergy as a class, and must have constituted a great reason, not only for their deplorable condition up till the last century, but also for the

bad relations and little respect existing between them and their parishioners to-day. The idea, as in England, of a pastor possessing the confidence of his flock, comforting the afflicted, helping the poverty-stricken, giving advice to those in spiritual doubt, and rebuking the wayward, is not understood either by the Russian priest or his parishioners. A priest's advice is practically never asked in the higher circles of Russian society nor in the middle strata; and the Russian peasant thinks much more of the family *ikon* and the ceremonies and rites of the Church than the personality of the priest himself. They call him *Batooshka*, a word expressing as near as possible "Dear Little Father," and this expression is as near as the peasant gets to evincing anything like love or reverence. It would seem as if the peasant takes the priest to be merely a necessary item of the Church's ceremonies and needs. Therefore he holds a certain position inside the Church, but outside he has none whatever. Indeed, he is still looked down upon, though morally and mentally he has improved out of all recognition, notwithstanding the fact that his increased education seems to have led

him to imbibe bureaucratic and reactionary ideas. Therefore the peasant turns in sunshine and sorrow to his *ikon* or his baptismal amulet. One will frequently see him take this out from beneath his clothes, spit on it, clean it, then placing it opposite to him, kneel prostrate before it and murmur forty *Gospodi Pomolui* ("Lord, have mercy upon us"). As has been aptly said, "The Egyptians had their gods in their gardens, the Africans carry them in their arms, and the Russians frequently in their trousers."

There are two classes of *ikons*—the ordinary ones made by men's hands, and those called miracle-working, holy *ikons*. The mode of bringing these latter into being is worth recording. A monk, or even a layman, has a vision in which he is informed of the presence of a miraculous *ikon* hidden at a certain spot. He hastens thither, generally at the dead of night for reasons that will be imagined by my readers, and the next day the countryside runs wild with the news. The Holy Synod in St Petersburg is informed, and takes steps to what it calls "verify" the accuracy of the details. These generally are proved up to the hilt, for I have been informed

that in the case of an ancient and important church whose funds are low, the Synod is consulted beforehand as to whether, in the event of an *ikon* being found, it would be recognised by it as a holy one, and so be permitted to act as a producer of revenue for the impoverished church in question, the people being in the habit of flocking from all parts of Russia to pay homage to one thus miraculously sent to earth. This authorisation having been received from the Synod, the *ikon* is duly "discovered," and becomes an image to which devotion is paid by thousands of weeping and wailing pilgrims, yearly travelling from all parts of the Empire.

And this is the twentieth century, and these preposterous Church frauds take place in a country which boasts of being part of civilised Europe, and are believed in by 100,000,000 of the deluded subjects of Nicholas II.!

In some instances the *ikon* is thought wonderful enough (or, to put it in another way, the Holy Synod wish to endow a particular church with a good benefit, so permit the *ikon*) to have a fête day all to itself. The method of ordaining a fête day and its origin are peculiarly interesting.

In 1796, in the days of the Emperor Paul, a coffin was found at the Convent of Sumorin, in the city of Trotma, in the eparchy of Vologda, containing the corpse of a monk. It had been interred in 1598, yet was in a state of perfect preservation, as were also the garments. From the letters embroidered on these, it was found to be the body of the most venerable Feodose Sumorin, founder and superior of the Convent, a man who had been acknowledged as a saint during his life for the miracles he had performed. The Synod made a report to Paul of the miraculous discovery, and the Emperor promulgated the following sublime Ukase:

“We, Paul, etc.: Having been certified by special report of the Holy Synod of the discovery that has been made in the Convent of Spasso Sumorin, of the miraculous remains of the most venerable Feodose, which miraculous remains distinguish themselves by the happy cure of all those who have recourse to them with entire confidence; we take the discovery of these holy remains as a visible sign that the Lord has cast His most gracious eye in the most distinguished manner on our reign. For this reason we offer our fervent prayers and our gratitude to the Supreme Disposer of all things, and charge

our most Holy Synod to proclaim this memorable discovery throughout all our Empire according to the forms prescribed by the Holy Church and by the Holy Fathers," etc., etc.

Thus are fête days created in Russia! Fête days or saints' days and *ikons* go hand in hand in the "education" of the people, and Russia's men of eminence have willy-nilly to submit to being deluged with the latter, and pretend to be much impressed in order that Russia's peasantry may be gulled still more into believing these superstitions.

I well remember that General Kuropatkin had *seventy ikons* of all sizes presented to him before starting for the Japanese War, and I have heard the peasants express wonderment that in consequence he did not meet with more success.

One word as to the salaries of the Russian priesthood. The incomes range ridiculously low, but that of the higher monks, such as the Metropolitan and Bishops, is augmented by gifts of land, and maybe a rich convent. Thus the Metropolitan's income of £250 is augmented by these means to about 30,000 to 40,000 roubles = £1500 to £2000. The lower

ranks have incomes less in proportion, and the parish priests would do badly indeed without aid in the shape of provisions from the peasantry and proprietors. It seems that the salaries of the Church are in inverse proportion to the ceremonial.

Who that has ever witnessed a Russian service — a Mass, for instance — can ever forget it? Indeed, such a ceremonial must not be missed by those who would know something of the Slav character. Enter the stately doors of that church, round which the beggars cluster, clothed in foul rags and loathsome with disease, their hands outstretched to crave a coin, and catch it as it falls. Enter. The incense-laden air suggests the scented boudoir; languor steals over the brain; a sense of luxury dominates one's soul—a feeling heightened by the gorgeous scene and the still silence of the lofty edifice, crowned with golden domes. *Ikons* of gold in golden frames, on which candles in candlesticks of solid gold shed brilliant light, causing the diamonds, sapphires, and countless precious stones to sparkle with a dazzling gleam. Gold candelabra, holding a myriad shining lights, reveal the paintings

covering wall and ceiling, and those shrines in shadowy niche where saints lie resting in their last long sleep, a candle ever burning night and day.

The church is packed. Motionless masses stand in expectation. There are no seats: proud noble shoulders peasant; the simple sheepskin kisses the frock of fashion, and scent-laden dames rustle and rub in silken finery against humble peasant women. All sound is hushed except the still murmur of reverent whispering, when suddenly a stentorian voice breaks on the death-like silence: "In the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, service beginneth." The Holy Books, glistening in gold and silver and every precious stone, are carried by two men, who can hardly lift them; and now the priest reads in rich resounding voice the lesson of the day, repeating at frequent intervals "*Gospodi Pomolui*" ("God, have mercy upon us"). Those carven doors, covered with silken veil, conceal the great High Priest, whose entry all await. The chorus of the hidden choir now breaks on the ear—a soft, sweet chant that seizes one's soul, and lifts one from thoughts of earth to dreams of Heaven. The

sacred pæan rises in solemn strain, whilst hearts beat in unison ; and the great High Priest enters, holding aloft the golden chalice, filled with the rich red wine, and murmurs a silent prayer, blessing the holy bread. Silence till now has reigned midst the densely - packed masses, but now the great bells peal, shaking the marble floor beneath one's feet. The golden *ikons*, the glittering candlesticks, the walls, even the church foundations tremble with the swell, while those but lately motionless, awed by the scene, now bend in reverence, crossing themselves again and yet again, and touch the church's sacred stones with bended head, kissing the very dirt on which they lately stood.

See there a frantic, frenzied host of *mushiks*, merchants, dames of high degree surge in an overwhelming wave to kiss the feet of the saint, and place a candle opposite his shrine. See there a peasant, grey with eighty years, bending his aged head to sweep with silvery locks the sacred floor, and tottering with the strain. Sobs fill the incense-laden air, and wailing women, holding babes in their arms, worship and weep. The vocal strains break forth once more, and the

throng is again silent, while it moves slowly towards the *Ikonostas* to partake of the holy wine. Then the massive doors of the church are thrown open, and the mass is ended.

No book on Russia's Peasantry would be complete without a mention of that dissenting sect, termed the *Raskolnik*, from the Russian word *Raskoláchevat*, "to cut away" — the *Raskolnik* having cut himself off from the Orthodox Church in the reign of Alexis, the father of Peter the Great, being unable to reconcile their faith with the reforms in the ancient Holy Books made by Nikon, the High Priest. Further points of contention were the methods of celebrating the ceremonial—how many fingers should be used in making the Cross? how many Alleluias were correct? how the Cross should be made—with four branches or with eight? how should the name of Jesus be spelt?

The sect was born in the *izba*—that is to say, in the very cradle of ignorance and blind superstition. It was not born of thought or literary or theological knowledge—it was the child of a firm and obstinate belief in the traditions handed down to them. To-day, amongst the Russian



Raskolnik Priest and his Choir.



Village Policemen.

peasantry we find eighteen to twenty million *Raskolniks*, the sect having increased notwithstanding the terrible persecution, reign after reign, to which it has been subjected until lately. Exile, persecution, death, from century to century have been its lot, but still it lives, although its inward spirit is only one of superstition.

“Scratch a Russian and find a Tartar.” Scratch a *Raskolnik*, and find the darkest ignorance and absolute lack of knowledge as to the why and wherefore of his creed. I have often asked *Raskolniks* why they are *Raskolniks*, and the answer in most cases was : “I do not know, *Barin* ; my fathers were, and so am I.” There is the only reason : lack of individuality and initiative. Gorboonoff, the talented Russian author, writes in 1888 :

“The *Raskolnik* is enclosed in strong walls, which effectually shut him in from the outside world and prevent his eyes seeing or his ears hearing. Ancient tradition, of which he knows only the ceremonial, constitutes his faith ; remove the walls, and the sect stands exposed a hollow sham. The ignorance of the peasantry alone maintains it. Illumine this nest of obscurity with the light of truth, and it stands exposed to all

and each as the essence of frivolity and meaningless emptiness."

The Russian Government has during the last three months promulgated a Decree permitting the sect freedom of action; but it must be said that, from the point of view of education of the peasant morally, socially, and intellectually, it were better far that the sect were not in existence. Its members are fairly steady, industrious, and more temperate than their brethren of the Orthodox church; but there is engendered throughout the cult an inborn hatred of the manners of the West and of Western importations of every kind, which acts as an effectual bar to intellectual progress and reform and individual thought. Quoting again M. Gorboonoff:

"Total darkness! Let the light of God shine and expose all the emptiness, all the lawlessness! Outside restraints! what strong walls surround this fortress of religion: inside!—nothing but emptiness! Hence—light, more light!"

But first feed them, then teach them; ignorance deprives them of the ability even to feed themselves. Glance for a moment at their methods of agriculture. They are antique, and their

implements fit objects for archæological museums. Nor will they ever use other weapons till Education reaches them. It is true they are too poor as individuals to indulge in high farming, but the fact remains that the vast majority have no wish to attempt better methods of agriculture, and certainly have not the knowledge necessary to work intelligently with other tools than those they have at present, and which they have had for hundreds of years. There *is* an intelligent body of peasantry in Russia—the concentrated sap of Russia's hundred millions; but this body I shall allude to later.

What is the agricultural year? It begins with the melting of the snow in April. Immediately this has disappeared, indeed before it has vanished, the buds appear on the trees and plants, and the green grass springs up as with the magic touch of a fairy wand.

On 17th April—St Stephen's Day—the cattle are driven into the green fields, the poor animals looking woebegone and emaciated after the semi-starvation they have undergone during the seven long winter months. The ceremony of driving the cattle out for the first time is marked by

the bestowal of benedictions by the priest, and the sprinkling of holy water. About the same period also the blessing of the water, relieved of its winter ice, takes place—the sister ceremony of benediction to that which takes place in winter when the rivers and streams first become coated with ice.

Ploughing takes place on St George's Day—22nd April — and the land is made ready for the summer grain. This toil provides them with work till the end of May. Then the fallow field is prepared for the winter grain. This lasts till St Peter's Day — 29th June — when the hay-making begins. Harvest commences about the middle of July, generally St Elijah's Day—20th July—until 31st August; and after having completed his reaping and stacking during that period, he sows the winter grain for the next year. September — about the end — sees the peasants' labour ended, and on 1st October is celebrated the Harvest Festival. Winter's approach is then near, and the cold snows are soon to descend and cover the earth and the peasant's *izba*, and freeze even the little energy of which he is capable. To most of the peasantry

it is a seven months' sleep, seven months of sloth abetted, one might almost say decreed, by the Church.

Taking it all in all, then, the position of the Church in the Russian village to-day is an unnatural one, and useless as a factor for moral or intellectual good, and untenable both for priest and people. And the *effect* of this *effete* priestly *régime* on the uneducated, ignorant millions of Russia's peasantry — the *effect* of these superstitions saturating the peasants' soul, and zealously propagated from year to year, from century to century, by the parish pope — the *effect* of hundreds of years of serfdom and slavish obedience to men who classified a human being and a dog in the same category — what is it seen to be to-day?

The answer may be summed up in two words — Ignorance and Melancholy! For where can one find people so melancholy as the Russian peasant of to-day? Remove from him the causes I have enumerated, and there still exist all the conditions which make for Melancholy and a morbid mind fit to receive with greedy voracity all that might tend to satisfy the peculiar

form of sympathy which is the crying need of the Russian peasant. Vast steppes, vast forests—Russia is a world of emptiness and solitude, of weird melancholy — a world which, combined with the life the peasant has lived, and inherited from his forefathers, has not only been the direct cause of the formation of his morose, depressed, and sad nature, but has continued to this hour as the prominent feature in the fostering of it. Autocracy in the past has annihilated him, aristocracy has assisted in the process, and the Church has compressed him in her encircling coils with a force which has proved irresistible.

The peasant emerges from the ordeal to-day but the semblance of a man—a thing with half a mind; a mortal without attributes; a morbid being blessed with life alone, and cursed with ignorance and imbecility until, in the twentieth century, the melancholy has become innate. Let a Russian but rise superior to his surroundings, and, imbibing an intelligence with which the condition of his birth had not provided him, breathe the feelings of his soul in poetry or prose, what is the sentiment there laid bare? Melancholy! Listen to the peasant chanting

his evening pæan in the solitude of his *izba*, his daily labour done. What is the burden of his song? Melancholy! Go where you will, what is the nature predominant amongst all? Melancholy! What can one expect otherwise?

And added to the factors enumerated above as the cause of this national attribute, periods of famine crowd upon one another in merciless and ever-increasing frequency. At this very moment Russia is gripped in Famine's deathly grasp. Over a small area of Russia's surface (nevertheless more than five times the size of France) the people are dying in thousands. I apologise to Mr Victor Marsden of Moscow, whose knowledge of Russia and Russian affairs is, perhaps, unrivalled amongst Englishmen to-day, for quoting here at length from a recent article of his. He says:—

“The economy of Russia is so arranged that it is no help to the starving peasant if his wealthy neighbour, the large landed proprietor—upon whose vast corn-lands he labours so many days per contract in payment for a few acres rented to him—has a magnificent harvest. The wealthy landowner enriches the soil with his capital, and gets harvests which are denied to the peasant, who never had any capital, and is always years behindhand with

his taxes. Moreover, the peasant does not eat the grain bought in London. He never sees wheat bread, white bread of any kind; what he eats is black bread—rye bread. The grain bought in London is, economically speaking, grown to pay the Government's debts to the foreign loan-monger, and must be sent out of the country to save the country from bankruptcy. The Government takes very good care—famine, 'local scarcity,' notwithstanding—that every available ounce of grain shall reach the foreign buyer, and calls it a prosperous year when the largest possible quantities are sold to pay interests on its debts abroad. The newspapers are forbidden to mention the word 'famine,' and local governors report a little 'local scarcity' to headquarters, and there the matter ends—or *did* end, until this wave of 'freedom' came over the country, and the Czar encouraged his people to speak their minds more freely. Oh yes! of course the Government conducts vast relief operations. It collects from the *muzhik* every year a special tax to pay for relief in times of 'local scarcity.' In the good old days this tax was collected in kind; the *muzhiks* of every village had their grain magazine, into which they collected annually after every harvest a store sufficient to see them through in food and seed-corn for the next harvest. But the Government many years ago abolished the grain magazines on the spot. Why? Well, there are plenty of good reasons to be found in political economy as practised in

Russia. The main reason was that grain did not grow in store, while the money tax, which was substituted for the grain magazines, all went to Petersburg, and whether the gold grew and multiplied there or not there is no knowing; but as things turned out, the *mushik* gets neither gold nor grain nowadays. The grain is not there, and the gold filters down from St Petersburg through so many, so very many, hands of rapacious and irresponsible officials. All Russia lives on the *mushik*, and a famine—a real famine like the present one—is nearly as great a God-send to a certain class of Government servants as a war is to others. Yes, there are 40,000,000 people now starving in Russia, and the winter is but just begun, the next harvest seven or eight months off. The seed-corn is eaten, and the ploughing horse is mostly eaten also. Fodder and root crops have failed as utterly as bread-stuffs, and there is no help. Russia has no roads and very few railways, and unless the carrying is done at certain seasons of the year, no mortal aid can avail. The money for relief was issued by the Treasury many months ago, but the grain to feed the famishing Russian is still being collected many hundreds of miles away from where it is wanted, and long after Russian grain has reached the British market, where there is no question of famine to be met. It is no new story: the same process is observable in the egg and butter trade, all of which bring in vast sums to the Government at the cost of the

health and well-being of the *mushik*. The richest land in the Empire, the granary of Europe that once was, is becoming yearly more and more remarkable for the deterioration of its people. Fat, grain-growing provinces of the Volga basin, for example, show a steadily increasing physical degeneration of the people. The recruiting returns in these provinces tell the tale pretty plainly. The percentage of rejections for physical defects in a purely agricultural population has doubled in the past twenty years; the percentage of those put back as still immature at the usual age has also about doubled; the growth of population is slowest and the death-rate highest in the very provinces that feed the foreigner. For more than a year past every private or local public effort to bring relief to the districts that were known a year ago to be threatened with famine, has been met by Government orders to arrest and imprison all and sundry found meddling with the peasants, on the suspicion that they were political propagandists. Children die like flies, doctors are few, and medicines practically unknown. In most of the stricken provinces there is neither bread nor money; the people are helpless as only men *can* be in the Russian Empire, unable to move from the scene that brings certain death. There are no roads, and no horses left fit to transport either workers or food. There is no country in the world except Russia that could ever drift into such a situation, and no peasantry in the world would

take death so quietly as the Russian has been taught by his Government to do for a generation past."

True words these—without garnish, and from the pen of one who knows Russia like a book, better than the Russians themselves. Then again I ask, what wonder that Melancholy is king? But if Melancholy is universal, is Ignorance the same? No! Scattered amidst Russia's vast peasant population are many who have risen superior to their surroundings, who have recognised and themselves endeavoured to remedy the state of slough amidst which they have been brought up, and in which their intellect has been sunken. These men—some young, some middle-aged, some patriarchal—have striven hard to educate themselves by writing and reading, in order to fit themselves to take the positions intended for them as men—the backbone of a great race that is to be. They form to-day, although a painfully small minority amidst the masses, a body of intelligent men—strong, morally, mentally, and physically, and essentially fitted to undertake the labours that they have taken upon themselves to accomplish—that of instructing their degraded, retrograde brethren.

I have met many of them, especially in Central Russia, and never can I banish from my memory a scene I was fortunate enough to witness at the beginning of last year in one of the provinces of European Russia. I had been privately notified that a meeting of peasantry, drawn from all parts of Russia, would take place at a certain spot, to discuss the Peasant question, and take measures for the drawing up of proposals to be submitted to the authorities, which proposals it was hoped, if carried out, would lead to measures of reform of a practical nature amongst their less enlightened brethren.

The meeting had to take place in secret, and so it came about that one bitterly cold night saw me driving in a two-horse sleigh in the midst of a blinding snowstorm to the isolated spot chosen for the rendezvous. Never shall I forget it! My driver, Anton Antonovitch, a *starosta* of a large village which shall be nameless, a man of great intelligence—his keen, deep-lined face peering from amidst his long lank grey hair, from which and from his snow-en-crusted beard hung innumerable dangling icicles—leaning forward, and with excited gestures,

like a charioteer in the Olympian games of old, urging the struggling horses forward.

It was an experience of which every detail is vivid in my memory to-day! Suddenly we drew up by the side of a huge barn, in the midst of a bleak, snow-white, wind-swept prairie, miles from the nearest habitation. Anton knocked loudly on the great doors, and a man emerged to take the sleigh and exhausted horses to a shed close by. Then entering, my friend rained a shower of blows on another door within. The echoes had barely died away amongst the rafters before the clang of an iron bar being drawn aside struck our ears, and the next moment the huge doors opened from within, disclosing, to my astonished gaze, a scene which will remain indelibly painted on my mind.

At the first glimpse there flashed across my mind the well-known picture depicting our Lord's Last Supper in Galilee. It was a wooden building of enormous size, and had evidently been used in days gone by for the storage of straw in winter; and down the centre of the huge barn—whose lofty roof, crossed and recrossed with massive beams seasoned by the hand of Time, re-echoed

the stifled hum of a multitude of whispering voices—ran a large rude table formed of boards resting on empty barrels. The dim light shed by two long candles placed at the table's head alone saved the situation from utter darkness, and illumined faintly but with weird effect the rugged profiles of the muttering peasant throng, the shadows deepening on every face, till out of the far obscurity of the shed, gleaming eyes, glistening with the reflected rays of the distant light, alone revealed whence came the low, suppressed murmuring of a hidden multitude.

The picture might well have been intended to represent a Biblical scene of old time, and the people the apostles and ancient patriarchs. Never have I seen a more sedate, more dignified body of men than the simple Russian peasantry, ranging in age from thirty to seventy, the majority bearded and endowed with highly intellectual features, their broad foreheads peeping prominently out from under the masses of long loose hair brushed negligently back behind the ears. All were dressed in the universal long sheepskin; and the whole formed a scene the like of which can have rarely been given any artist, ancient or modern, to paint.

On our entry an aged peasant of dignified appearance, the President of the gathering, rose from his seat at the head of the table between the two long candles, and bid us welcome. A seat was then provided me on the right of the chair, and the proceedings began. I will but give the gist of the opening address, and one or two of the resolutions arrived at.

The President, rising amidst a dead silence and speaking in solemn earnest, said "My brothers, we are met here to form a League, and discuss measures which shall enable us and our brethren throughout this poor, oppressed land of Russia to fight the battle of freedom, and to think, act, and live as free men. I ask you to devote yourselves to-night and from to-night to the attaining of that object, and may the great God above help us in His goodness and mercy." Then followed much discussion, and I append in brief certain resolutions :

I. That this Society be formed to discuss and carry out the best means of defending our Peasant rights, and bringing before His Majesty the Tzar, our rulers, our fellow-peasants, and the Russian people the following facts :

- (a). We demand freedom of speech, freedom to read and write, freedom and the facilities to learn and educate ourselves. We swear to work together to obtain these rights.
- (b). We were made free by our Father the Tzar in 1861, and we demand that efforts be made to bestow real freedom upon us in the true sense of the word.

There were many other resolutions of an equally strong character, and I must say some which, to my mind, were too violently worded, and breathed a spirit too unbridled, too unstatesmanlike and undiplomatic, to be of great service to the Peasant Cause. But there was in this gathering, as in all gatherings, an excited element, and there were many minds over which brooding melancholy and an inborn feeling of discontent, fostered in their breasts through years of striving to improve their condition, held sway. Serious as these men were, they were yet unschooled in the art of suave diplomatic phrasing, and their thoughts were expressed accordingly.

Be these facts as they may, I feel that my readers will not fail to be interested in this brief account of a meeting of Russian peasantry, giving, as it does, an idea of what material

there is to be found even amidst the crude, uncultured hordes of Russia's rural population.

And is the Government endeavouring to help these people who help themselves? Let us turn for a few facts regarding this point to an article in the *Times* of this month, it being noted that the opening of the new Russian Duma is near at hand, and the Bureaucracy do not wish to have "undesirables" in the Russian Parliament, for they might act so inconveniently for Bureaucracy. Then let us see what this Russian gentleman says, writing in the *Times*:

"The Minister of Ways and Communications has decreed that 'no railway employees must be allowed to neglect their duties on election days.' This means that over 100,000 railwaymen will be deprived of the right to vote. A fine of 1000 roubles is imposed on employers who pay strikers wages for days of strike. Union leaders have been arrested wholesale, and governors of provinces have been given discretionary powers to expel any undesirable people from their province (and to class all unemployed people as undesirables). Result: the Governor issues orders to employers through his police subordinates to dismiss disaffected employees, who accordingly become unemployed, and as such cannot vote. In one week (14th to

21st November 1906) ten papers were suppressed in various provinces, seven had one issue confiscated, eight more were prosecuted; three editorial offices were searched, and three printing-offices were closed. Of the Labour members of the last Duma, ten are in prison, nine are in hiding in Russia, four escaped abroad, two are in exile, and one is in a madhouse. Of six clerical members who took to preaching on subjects outside the cure of souls, one was arrested, and one excommunicated, while all ex-members who held municipal offices, or posts under municipal boards, have been dismissed under Government instructions by their respective *Zemstvos* and municipalities. The ex-members of noble rank have also not been neglected. Thirteen have had their names struck off the lists of provincial nobility by their provincial assemblies, a penalty which deprives them of all political rights."

Thus has the Government helped budding intelligence, and aided the peasant hordes and artisans of the towns to take an interest in the affairs of the country. Then when will the peasant arrive at that point where it will be able to sweep aside the efforts of a retrograde Bureaucracy, take part in the deliberations of their country, and freely indulge in education, culture, and all that leads to intellectual advance-

ment? Let me quote in answer that same French writer (the author of the *Secret Memoirs of the Court of Catherine II.*) from whose dicta I have before drawn. Says he, writing a hundred years ago :

"If, as some pretend, the French Revolution be destined to spread over the globe, Russia will assuredly be the last place it will reach. It will be the combat of Day against Night, the last conflict of Philosophy and Reason against Barbarism and Ignorance. There is no likelihood that a revolution after the French model should break out in Russia as yet, but there may be one for which it is already ripe—that of a more enlightened aristocracy. It must be confessed that the friend of Russia and of Liberty cannot wish for a change of any other sort at present—it is the only one of which this vast empire is susceptible. The people, in the deplorable condition in which they are, are unfit for liberty ; they must be prepared for it, they must be brought to *desire* it before it be offered them. They would abuse it, or, what is more horrible, they would reject it. It may be said with truth that the Russian Government is less inclined to tyranny than the people are prone to slavery. With them, therefore, nothing can be done at present. The most flattering hope which Russia can entertain is that she may see one day on the throne an emperor sufficiently

wise and great to give it laws to which he himself will submit, a prince of such magnanimity as to be ashamed to reign inglorious over a people destitute of rights, and who may be capable of forming from the summit of his throne a gentle and easy descent to arrive at freedom without a fall. Under a new system of Government, Russians might prepare themselves for that grand revolution of the human mind, for which some think them already susceptible. Liberty and the happiness of mankind can only be accomplished facts when the people shall be prepossessed in favour of sound principles of Government. *It is to be feared that Russia is yet ages from prepossessions of that nature!* Take heart, then, Russians of the old *régime*, who have trembled at the progress of the French Revolution. Before you arrive at that dreaded regeneration, you have still to pass through all the stages of civilisation. A nation must be polished before it can be informed; yours is yet in its infancy. Before it can come to a reasonable Government, it must have had kings; you have as yet had only autocrats. Do you fear a constitution? You have not yet laws. Do you dread a National Assembly? You have not yet a Parliament. At last, however, the memorable epoch will arrive in Russia and elsewhere. The progress of liberty is like that of Time—slow but sure—and some day will reach the North.”

Memorable words these, spoken just one hundred

years ago. What may be said in comparing that statement of a century ago with the situation to-day? One thing is certain, that the masses, that is the great majority of Russia's peasantry, are absolutely unfit to be entrusted with any form of responsibility in connection with the Government of the country. They have yet to be educated, yet to be made individuals of ordinary intelligence, yet to arrive at the dignity of manhood.

Let me conclude with the combined wail and pæan of an old *Raskolnik*, above his fellows in education and intelligence, and therefore exiled thirty years ago to beyond the Urals. I have endeavoured to translate into English verse the pathetic lines of the old peasant poet, exiled from home, from family, and his village in far-away Western Russia.

MISERY.

Was it for this, that God's light flattered me,
An exile, spurned, sunken in deepest sorrow,
Only to know man's venom'd calumny
Will pierce my soul afresh on each fresh morrow?
Dark the horizon ! sits forbidding gloom,
A hopeless melanch'ly, on yon day dawning,
Fear grips my heart, the seal of coming doom
Stamps on my soul the dread of morrow's morning

Was it for this that God's light flattered me?

Hot stream the tears across my careworn cheeks.

Shall Youth's young dream of happiness quite shattered be?

Oh God ! 'tis false ; a Voice within me speaks :

JOY.

Speaks ! and lo the future is unfolded—

Beckon me the woods to come and play,

Frolic in their depths in sweet oblivion,

Scatter darkness with the light of day.

Wander in the wilds amidst the roses,

Listen to the whispering of the brooks,

Hear the nightingale at even warbling,

Sleep, 'midst the mossy bedded nooks.

There, in solitude with Nature,

The caves my covering, the Sun my heat,

Beasts shall be to me as brethren,

Rags my clothing, bare shall be my feet.

Hills, shedding tears of joy eternal,

Weep in never-ending stream,

Lazily the rugged rocks o'er-leaping

Music to my life-long dream.

There sweet repose will never leave me,

Far from Wickedness and Vice,

Waiting until God's voice call me

Home—to Peace and Paradise !

Thus sings the old peasant, and I am sure it will be the fervent wish of all my readers, as it is mine, that all Russia's Peasantry will attain to Peace in this world and Paradise in the next.

THE END.

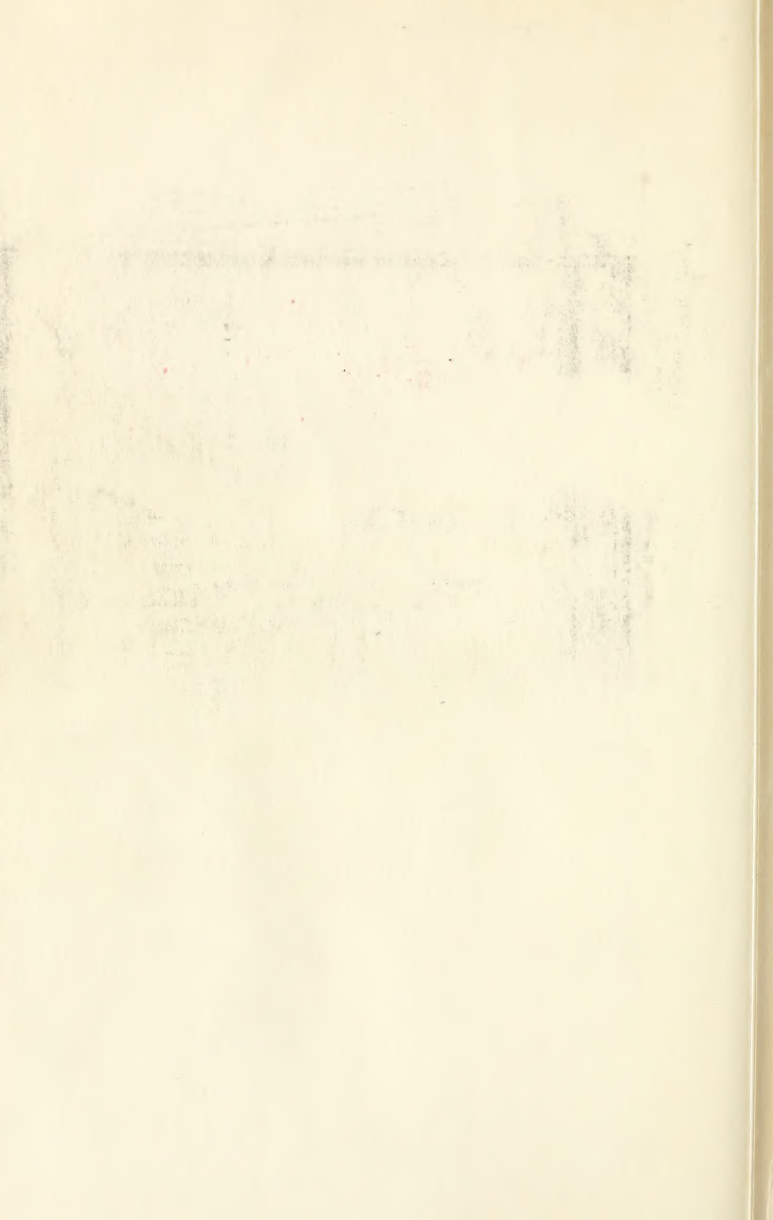
Printed at
The Edinburgh Press,
9 and 11 Young Street











PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY

DK
32
K4

Kennard, Howard Percy
The Russian peasant

